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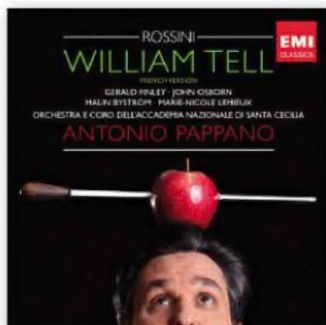
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Best of the year

from EMI and Virgin Classics



Antonio Pappano

Antonio Pappano and the choir and orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia present Rossini's final French opera seria, *William Tell*, recorded live in concert in Rome.



Diana Damrau

Soprano Diana Damrau presents Richard Strauss' songs. Favourites such as *Ständchen*, *Wiegenlied*, and *Allerseelen* feature alongside more rarely heard numbers.



Simon Rattle

Following the release of the complete Brahms symphonies, Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker have recorded a programme of orchestral works by Arnold Schoenberg.



Kate Royal

This song cycle charts a young girl's journey of love and loss in four chapters: Waiting, Meeting, Wedding and Betrayal. It combines German Lieder, English and American songs and French melodies.



Alexandre Tharaud

The imaginative French pianist performs a selection of Domenico Scarlatti's captivating keyboard sonatas, drawing inspiration from developments in historically informed performance.



Joyce DiDonato

DiDonato takes full advantage of the vocal and gender range of the mezzo repertoire, voicing not only the eager young men of her many "trouser" roles but also passionate heroines.



Christina Pluhar

L'Arpeggiata, the multi-faceted ensemble led by Christina Pluhar, brings its "unrivalled instrumental and vocal virtuosity" to Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine*.



The John Wilson Orchestra

World renowned conductor and arranger John Wilson leads an all-star cast of singers and his eponymous orchestra on this recording of the best-loved songs from Hollywood's Golden Age.



Quatuor Ebène

After their award-winning debut CD of Debussy, Ravel and Fauré, a Brahms programme and the pop-jazz *Fiction*, the quartet turns to two of Mozart's Haydn Quartets and the Divertimento KV 138.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



For this issue's cover story, **PHILIP CLARK** explored Stravinsky's composing legacy ('much tougher to come to terms with than that of Schoenberg, Bartók, Hindemith, Webern or Berg') by talking to those who knew him, an experience he found 'wonderfully enlightening; some questions answered, many more provoked'.



JED DISTLER was particularly keen to recommend recordings by the late American pianist Paul Jacobs for this month's Specialist's Guide. 'He did a lot for new music,' Jed says. 'He didn't make many recordings, but definitely enough to talk about. He was also the pianist and harpsichordist for the New York Philharmonic.'



MIKE ASHMAN has long admired the voice of Jussi Björling but, in writing for *Gramophone*, he made a discovery: 'I didn't know what a wonderful recitalist he became, more dangerous and intimate than in his opera sets. These Swedish and American concerts of his last decade were the real eye-openers of his posthumous legacy.'

GRAMOPHONE

Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

Stravinsky, the man and the musician – 40 years on



Chatting to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau on the phone a little while ago (a colossal, even classic, name-drop I know, of which more later) when we'd just started preparing this issue's tribute to Stravinsky, I mentioned that one reason for the salute was that this year marks four decades since the composer's death. 'Forty years, already?' he sighed. 'It goes so fast.'

I suppose that was the moment it hit me, born after Stravinsky's departure, quite how modern he remains. Such was his impact on the music world, so momentous his influence, that he seems already, he is, part of history. Stravinsky's birth heralded a new epoch during which his physically diminutive presence loomed so large that everything after his death is naturally defined as 'post-Stravinsky'. So in some senses it's all too easy to think of today as separated from that time.

Yet the fact of his death doesn't mean that his work doesn't live, and in some ways it continues. It continues in the composers who came after him and explored the paths he forged. It continues in the reminiscences and teachings of those who actually knew him and pass on the flame. So it seemed apt to include some of those reminiscences in this issue. If we focus more on the man than the musical theory that's because many of these tales haven't been told before – and it's 40 years on and in another 40 they could have been lost forever. We've tracked

'It has been one of the great delights of the job that one can pick up the phone to a musical hero and (usually) be assured of a pleasant response'

down some of Stravinsky's most fascinating colleagues. So enjoy their anecdotes. I guarantee you'll never think of the composer in quite the same way again.

I started this editorial with a name-drop. It has been one of the great delights of the job that one can pick up the phone to a musical hero and (usually) be assured of a pleasant response. I hope that continues for me, but it won't be as editor of *Gramophone*. This is my last issue in that capacity as, after nearly six years to the day, I leave to seek new challenges. Leave? I should say revert, to my former role as avid reader, with some writing no doubt thrown in. Thank you for having me as guardian of this great magazine for these years. It has been a privilege.

James



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December 2011

GRAMOPHONE *Choice*

Informed by our unrivalled panel of critics,
we choose the month's must-hear recordings

*Recording of the Month*

*'They play up Schumann's
unique combination of
whimsy and fervour...
These are performances to
make you fall in love with
the music all over again'*

SCHUMANN
String Quartets, Op 41
Doric String Quartet
Chandos CHAN10692

► **FOR THE FULL REVIEW BY HARRIET SMITH, TURN TO PAGE 54**

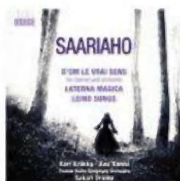


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including Recording of the Month, through the
online Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk



IRELAND
Piano Concerto, etc
Lenehan *pf* RLPO / Wilson
Naxos 8 572598
'Its bright finale has
an indelible main
theme you won't be
able to get out of
your head once the
work concludes...
John Lenehan
is again at his
finest here.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



SAARIAHO
'D'om le vrai sens', etc
Kriikku *cl* Korsi *sop*
Finnish Radio SO / Oramo
Online ODE1173-2
'Cast in interlinked
movements, the
concerto explores
the five senses as
depicted in the
medieval tapestry
series, *The Lady
and the Unicorn*.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



STRAVINSKY
The Firebird
Les Siècles / Roth
Musicales Actes
Sud ASM06
'*The Firebird* was the
sensation of 1910. It
is played here with
a difference. The
intention is for it to
sound as it did to
those first, dazzled
Paris audiences.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS.
MCEWEN**
Works for Viola and
Orchestra
Power *va* BBC NOW /
Brabbits
Hyperion CDA67839
'Power's playing is
wonderfully varied,
at times delicate and
poetical, at others
broad, passionate
and generous.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



PURCELL
Twelve Sonatas
in Three Parts
Retrospect Trio
Linn CKD374
'These performances
of brief movements
convey rhetorical
suggestions of
speaking intimately,
unforced breathing,
and listening
attentively.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

**GIULIANI**

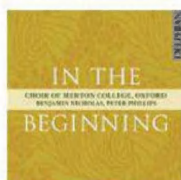
Guitar Works

Eduardo Fernández gtr
Oehms Classics OC401

'Fernández delights in the simplicity and virtuosity of Giuliani's music while bringing a vast dynamic and tonal palette to bear on its more subtle aspects of coloration.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77****HERMANN****Moby Dick****Danish National Choir and**
Symphony Orchestra /**Michael Schönwandt**
Chandos CHSA5095

'This performance is full of excitement... In surround sound it is simply stunning with vivid singing and playing, all of the highest order.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86****'IN THE BEGINNING'****Merton College Choir,**
Oxford / Phillips, Nicholas**Delphian DCD34072**

'This choir are fully responsive to the different styles of 16th- and 17th-century polyphonic compositions and the rich chordal textures of 20th- and 21st-century pieces.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91****'LAMENTAZIONE'****Les Arts Florissants /**
Paul Agnew**Virgin Classics 070907-2**

'Leo's *Miserere* (1739) is sung with the boldness, authority, lamentation and soft compassion that the composer variously demands... a masterly and valuable recording'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92****DVD****WAGNER****Tannhäuser****Royal Danish Opera****Decca CATNO**

'Copenhagen's experienced bevy positively feast on the vocal and acting opportunities offered by Holten's Ibsenesque ground production.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103****Reissue****EILEEN JOYCE****The Complete Parlophone**
& Columbia Solo
Recordings, 1933-45**APR APR7502**

'Not for nothing was Joyce chosen to play Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto for the soundtrack of *Brief Encounter*.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**

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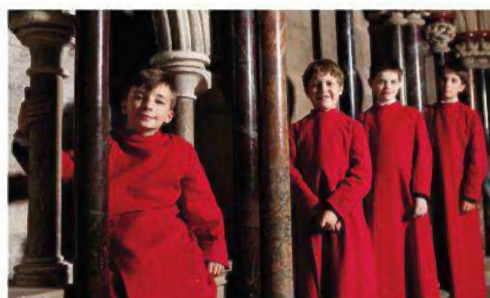
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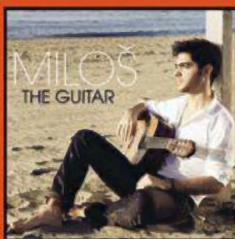


38 Carols from St John's: both ancient and modern



presence [prez-uhns]: the state or fact of being present, as with others or in a place. 2. immediate proximity. 3. attendance or company.

As the *festive season* fast approaches, we thought we'd take this opportunity to thank you, our *discerning* audience for yet another year monopolising your ears. As you know, over the course of the year we have put all our efforts toward providing you with ground breaking, *impeccably recorded* releases, spanning genre as well as the globe. Many of you have expressed your gratitude by word, as well as by wallet, providing us with more imputus (*as if it were needed*) to continue our efforts to deliver beautifully recorded and packaged music. As well as our gratitude, we offer you the opportunity to leave this publication open, on a convenient surface, near a loved one; as a hint. As well as a remarkable review of some of this years output, with *luck* it may lead to *Presents...*



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Daily Telegraph

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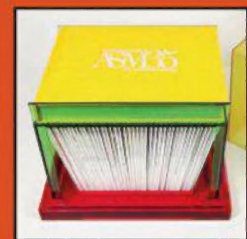
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***** *Classic FM Magazine*



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THE GRAMOPHONE PLAYER



The *Gramophone* Player allows you to explore the finest new releases of the month, through complete tracks from our *Gramophone* Choice albums, as well as excerpts from the recordings recommended in this issue's *Gramophone* Collection. You can also listen to the latest Podcast, in which we ask leading artists about their craft – this month we talk to violinist Richard Tognetti ahead of his European tour with his Australian Chamber Orchestra.

ONLINE FEATURES



James Inverne visited Rome to investigate Mahler's links with the city and to hear Antonio Pappano conduct the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in the composer's epic Eighth Symphony.

BLOGS



Follow the progress of the restoration of the mighty organ from London's Temple Church, as Caroline Gill explores what lies behind (and within) this beautiful work of musicianship and machinery.

GRAMOPHONE HOMEPAGE

Log on for the latest news, explained and explored, from the classical music world, for features about composers both household and obscure, to browse more than 87 years of *Gramophone* in our digitised archive, to enter our regular quiz, to find out which recordings are where in the weekly Specialist Classical Chart and to engage with the discussion in our vibrant *Gramophone* Forum. You can even read the magazine electronically by subscribing to our digital edition.

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with Bernard Haitink, Valery Gergiev
and Sir Colin Davis

SACD 506675



Bruckner Symphony No 4
Bernard Haitink, LSO

New release 14 November

'Great hushes, mighty crescendos, time for every duplet and triplet to be grounded yet to resonate with momentum. This was Bruckner's maximal minimalism at its most majestic' *The Times* (UK) concert review

SACD 506668



Mahler Symphony No 9
Valery Gergiev, LSO

Outstanding Recording

'Nothing can detract from the excellence of this disc: it is quite outstanding' *International Record Review* (UK)

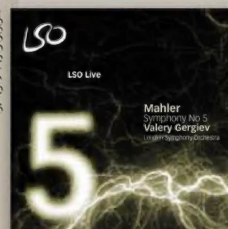
SACD 506679



Debussy La mer, Jeux
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune
Valery Gergiev, LSO

'this disc proves Gergiev to be a fine Debussy conductor ... there is a certitude as well as subtlety even in the subtle textures of the *Prélude*, while in *La Mer*, one can almost taste the salt spray' *Sunday Times* (UK)

SACD 506666



Mahler Symphony No 5
Valery Gergiev, LSO

Outstanding Recording

'A magnificent performance in every respect' *International Record Review* (UK)

SACD 506674



Nielsen Symphonies Nos 4 & 5
Sir Colin Davis, LSO

Editor's Choice
Gramophone (UK)

Choice of the Month - Orchestral
BBC Music Magazine (UK)

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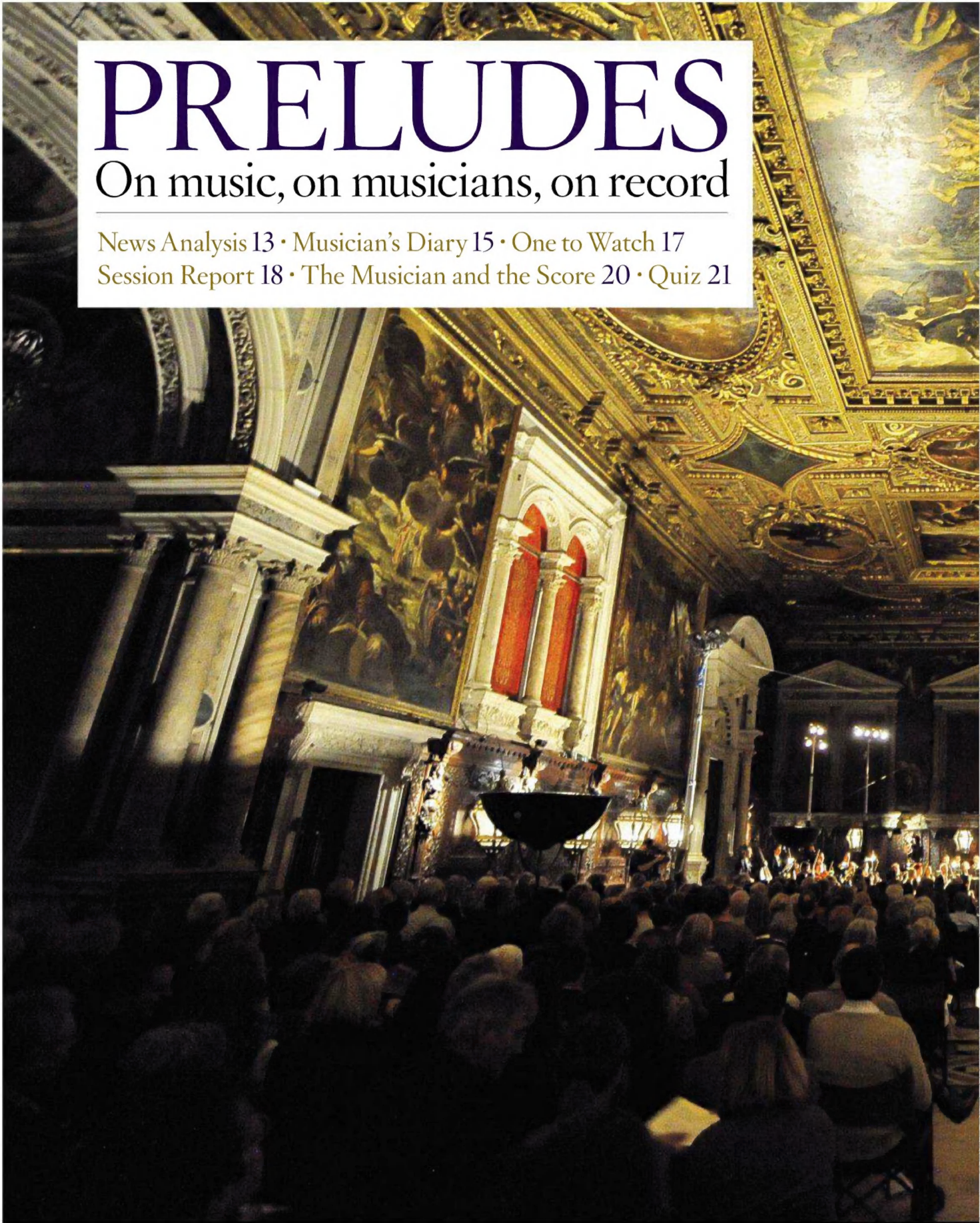
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PRELUDES

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Venetian grandeur, musical drama

Where Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice

When October 8, 2011

The details Véronique Gens, Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques perform 19th-century arias from their 'Tragédiennes 3' release on Virgin Classics

Our next issue explores concert hall architecture of the past 10 years. But as visionary as modern creations can be, every new building must compete for drama and beauty with those from centuries gone – and few halls can rival this astonishing 16th-century Venetian room, lined with the most exquisite examples of Tintoretto's artistry. You can hear more about the event in an interview with Christophe Rousset on a *Gramophone* Podcast – just search for 'Gramophone Magazine' in the iTunes store.

► To read *Gramophone*'s review of the disc, turn to page 105






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NEWS ANALYSIS

'Barenboim's La Scala appointment is a musical and political coup'

The appointment of classical heavyweight Daniel Barenboim as La Scala's next music director is in many respects an obvious choice. As the opera company's current principal guest conductor, Barenboim already spends around two or three months in Milan each season, working on two productions. The move to 15 weeks per year from December 2011, when he formally assumes the role, therefore marks a natural progression.

But accepting the new five-year contract has been more than a passive decision. La Scala has been without a music director since the departure of Riccardo Muti in 2005 after 20 years at the helm. Muti's resignation came amid arguments with the theatre's

'Appointing Barenboim represents an endorsement of his ability to navigate potentially choppy political waters'

management and strike action on the part of orchestral members and staff. The move to appoint Barenboim, long desired by the company, has hardly been a hasty one, then, and represents an endorsement not only of his impressive musical leadership, but also of his ability to navigate potentially choppy political waters.

Certainly, the past five years at La Scala have not been without difficulty. Strikes in 2007 and 2008 were followed by a wave of disruptions throughout Italy in 2010 in response to government cuts for all 14 publicly funded opera houses. Barenboim was personally affected by the action that year, when La Scala's opening performance of its new *Ring* cycle, which he was due to conduct, was cancelled. However, that experience has done little to dissuade the conductor, who by now has forged close ties with the orchestra.

Hiring one of the world's most respected and recognised musical names can only serve the already celebrated opera company well. Even juggling his roles as music director of Berlin's Staatsoper and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Barenboim can wield the kind of clout needed to stiffen the resolve of wavering government support for the arts – a major concern in financially stricken Italy.

So, a beneficial marriage for both parties then: La Scala gains a musically and politically powerful figurehead and Barenboim can spend more time making music with peers he has grown to admire.

Relations in the north of England have been a little strained of late as two of the UK's best loved and highly regarded orchestras disputed the title of Britain's longest-serving professional symphony.

The Hallé, which can claim a 153-year unbroken record of performance, had advertised itself on its website and in marketing material as the UK's 'longest-serving permanent professional' organisation. Then an unidentified supporter of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra took umbrage and issued a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority on the grounds that the RLPO could beat the Hallé's record by 18 years.

A seven-month inquiry followed, with the Hallé presenting evidence of its early existence as a professional body and attempting to prove that the RLPO, though founded in 1840, was acting in its initial incarnation 'as a concert promoter, rather than an orchestra'.

Despite such valiant efforts, the Hallé has had to admit defeat, as the ASA ruled its claim to be 'misleading'. Both orchestras accepted the verdict magnanimously. 'We're proud of our colleagues at the Hallé,' said the RLPO. 'Liverpool and Manchester are lucky to have two quality, well-established orchestras.' ⑥



Specialist Classical Chart The UK's best-selling pure classical releases

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 (2) Liszt - 'My Piano Hero'
Lang Lang <i>Sony</i> | 6 (8) Striggio - Mass in 40 Parts
I Fagiolini / Hollingworth <i>Decca</i> |
| 2 (1) 'Italia'
Nicola Benedetti; SCO / Curnyn <i>Decca</i> | 7 (6) McCartney - Ocean's Kingdom
London Classical Orch <i>Decca</i> |
| 3 (1) Miloš - 'The Guitar'
Miloš Karadaglić <i>DG</i> | 8 (16) The Maltese Tenor
Joseph Calleja <i>Decca</i> |
| 4 (6) Shostakovich - Symphonies Nos 6 & 12 RLPO / Petrenko <i>Naxos</i> | 9 (9) Anna Netrebko - 'Live at the Met'
Anna Netrebko; Metropolitan Opera <i>DG</i> |
| 5 (4) Dvořák - String Quartets, Opp 106 & 96
Pavel Haas Quartet <i>Supraphon</i> | 10 (New) Beethoven - The Symphonies
Gewandhaus Orchestra / Chailly <i>Decca</i> |



Lang Lang: tops the chart with Liszt

Chart for week ending October 30 (previous week's position in brackets). Visit gramophone.co.uk for weekly updates of the chart, along with reviews

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Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra
Myung-Whun Chung and Deutsche Grammophon
presents French specialties
Debussy and Ravel



"I'm sure everyone who was present
will be hoping for a swift return."

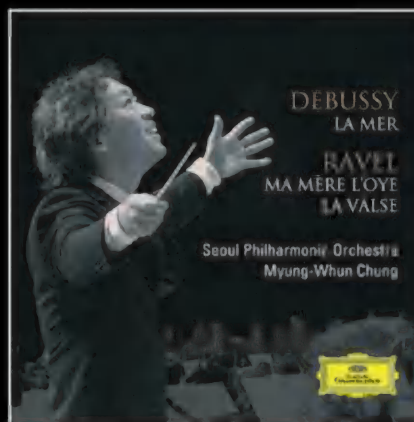
- *Bachtrack* (from 2011 Amsterdam concert)

"The playing is disciplined and beautifully blended."

- *The Sunday Times* ★★★★★

"...impressive grasp of tone and texture."

- *Independent* ★★★★★



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MUSICIAN'S DIARY

Scaling the peaks with Leoš Janáček

Pianist *Ivana Gavrić* takes inspiration from the vast landscapes of Canada and Norway

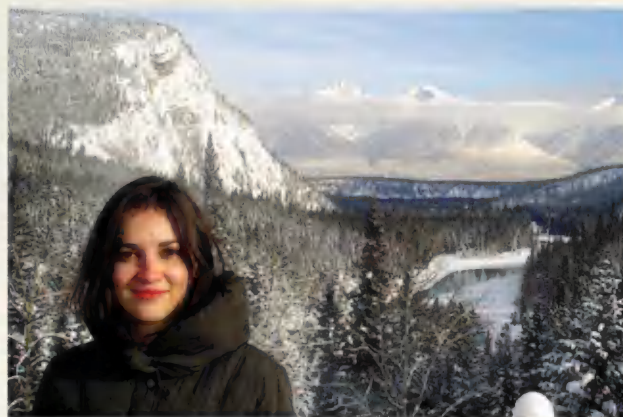
After I'd performed and recorded *In the Mists*, exploring Janáček's remaining oeuvre was a natural direction for me to take for my second album. So when an opportunity arose to take up a residency at the Banff Arts Centre in Alberta, Canada, last autumn, before the recording, I jumped at the chance – after all, what better way to absorb the works of this nature-loving composer than in the mountains, albeit thousands of miles from his beloved Hukvaldy?

Places like Banff are of vital importance to musicians and artists. I found it incredibly nourishing to have the time to get away from the noise and stress of daily life, take stock, reflect and be inspired while also enjoying access to wonderful practice and performance facilities, and being surrounded by like-minded people. One of my favourite diversions while preparing the set of pieces *On an Overgrown Path* was to watch from my practice studio as baby deer and elk tried to dig up bits of grass buried in the snow.

'I watched from my practice studio as baby deer and elk tried to dig up bits of grass buried in the snow'

Janáček's unique voice has intrigued me ever since I first heard his Piano Sonata and his opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*. There is often a feeling of an internal conflict in the music – as if it wants to embrace and tear away at the same time – and yet, ultimately, it is incredibly melodic and loving. Especially striking is the growth in confidence and exuberance of his writing towards the end of his life. About a decade before his death, he met his muse and the love of his life, Kamila Stösslová, and at the same time began to receive the recognition for his work that he had long craved.

I wanted to share my enthusiasm for Janáček's music and present it to a wider audience – which is why I decided to curate two London festivals dedicated to his work this year. At The Forge in February we explored his solo piano works, the small chamber pieces and the song-cycle *The diary of one who disappeared*. Then, the three mini-concerts as part of the Kings Place Festival in September gave me an opportunity to perform the rarely played *Capriccio* for piano left hand, flute and brass ensemble, as well as the quirky *Concertino*, all with the brilliant Aurora Orchestra. Janáček initially resisted the commission to write for a one-handed pianist, likening it to dancing with one leg. However, realising that he could combine it with another idea he'd had for a military band, he wrote one of the most unusual works I have played, full of wonky folk-like tunes as well as Debussian textures and climaxes. During the performance of the *Capriccio* I was beaming so much at its electrifying end that I forgot to play the last octave using both my hands – a little joke I had thought up for the audience! I'd had the idea of announcing each concert with the 'Fanfare' of his



Enjoying the majesty of the Canadian Rockies in Alberta



Rehearsing the one-handed piano and brass Capriccio



Grieg's tiny lakeside composing hut at Trolldhaugen, Bergen



Trying out Grieg's Steinway in his endearing house

Sinfonietta, and it was wonderful to see many jaws drop among the milling audience as the brass blared out in the atrium of Kings Place.

I'm always drawn to composers who use folksong in their music. Perhaps it's innate: I grew up in Sarajevo where I was exposed to a lot of folk music. But I also feel that it transcends borders – a folksong from another country touches us like our own. A recent discovery of mine has been the set of short dances called *Slåtter* by Grieg. Originally Hardanger fiddle tunes, Grieg arranges and recomposes them for piano with typically transparent textures, but the pieces also contain some of his most innovative writing – at times one could be forgiven for thinking one was listening to Bartók. Grieg was one of my first 'favourite composers' as a child and I was really excited to be invited to perform at Trolldhaugen this summer, a concert hall built next to his home in Bergen. Overlooking his tiny composing hut and the view of the lake he had from it – from the concert platform – I felt much closer to the composer. A real treat after the concerts was to take a private tour of his endearing house and a chance to play on his own Steinway, which was in surprisingly good shape. ⑥

► For Gramophone's review of Ivana Gavrić's 'From the Street' on Champs Hill Records, featuring music by Ravel, Janáček and Prokofiev, turn to page 81

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ONE TO WATCH

'A wealth and depth of ideas'

Young pianist *Hannes Minnaar* shows curiosity and maturity in equal measure

Still only 27, Dutch pianist Hannes Minnaar is already well established having made his professional debut as a teenager 10 years ago with the Netherlands Symphony Orchestra. International acclaim followed when he won prizes at the Geneva International Music Competition in 2008 and the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2010.

Seasoned maestros, including Alfred Brendel and Menahem Pressler, have followed Minnaar's early career with interest, and thanks in part to their guidance the Amsterdam Conservatory graduate is now set fair on a well-judged musical path. Recitals in Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Leipzig's Gewandhaus have been complemented by concerto performances with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Chamber music is another vital ingredient – Minnaar's Van Baerle Trio won the Lyon International Chamber Music and Vriendenkrans competitions in 2011.

Minnaar recorded his debut CD this year, of Rachmaninov's First Piano Sonata and Ravel's *Miroirs* and *Sonatine*, which prompted *Gramophone* critic Jeremy Nicholas to describe him as a 'convincing tonal colourist and ardent romantic'. Released on Etcetera Records, it was supported by a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship.

So, what next for this eye-catching new talent? Apart from his debut with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Herbert Blomstedt in 2013 – and several other Dutch orchestras – Minnaar will make a first appearance in the UK on March 21 next year, at a small event at the salon of music philanthropists Bob and Elisabeth Boas in aid of the Nicholas Boas Trust. **G**

► To read the review of Minnaar's recording, turn to page 78



The mentor *Marin Alsop*

I had the pleasure of working with Hannes Minnaar in the final rounds of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2010. Hannes is an authentically gifted pianist/musician with a great future ahead of him. He is intelligent, curious and passionate – a winning combination. His technique and sense of sound are highly developed and enable him to express his wealth and depth of imaginative ideas. I look forward to watching his promising career unfold.



SESSION REPORT Les Siècles

Work: Stravinsky: *The Firebird*

Artists: Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Date: October 2 & 9, 2010

Venue: Cité de la Musique (Oct 2) & Cathédrale de Laon (Oct 9)

Engineers: Jiri Heger, Frédéric Briant

Producer: Jiri Heger

Session Times: From 8pm (Oct 2) & 8.30pm (Oct 9)

Words: Geoffrey Norris

‘For me and for the musicians,’ says François-Xavier Roth, ‘recordings are like a souvenir of a concert, a postcard from a live occasion.’ And this is as live an occasion as you could get. It is October last year, a packed house, a buzz, and an enthusiastic response from an audience that knows Roth’s work and has been enticed to Paris’s ultra-modern Cité de la Musique by his latest project, a celebration of the pioneering theatrical presence of Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes.

A century earlier, Diaghilev had been a crucial force in bringing the 28-year-old Stravinsky to international prominence by staging the premiere of *The Firebird* at the Paris Opéra on June 25, 1910. Roth’s idea is to recreate the event, minus the dancers, the choreography and the scenery but with the sort of instruments and the orchestral dimensions that Stravinsky would have recognised. Not only that, but, to make the evening complete, Roth has also resurrected the original companion piece to *The Firebird*, a sequence of miniatures by Arensky, Glazunov, Grieg and Sinding that Stravinsky had orchestrated specially.

The concert in the Cité de la Musique is given after a dress rehearsal (both performances are recorded), and the applause at the end is immediate and ecstatic, but Roth is not keen on applause at the end of his discs, even if it might give added ‘témoignage’, or evidence, of their provenance. But no matter: there was the dress rehearsal, and the final bar that we hear on the recording is taken from that.

‘It was my dream as a student to perform on appropriate instruments. People are now ready for it’

– François-Xavier Roth

Together with his orchestra Les Siècles, Roth has spent years exploring the sound worlds of past eras, and the results of his findings have been channelled into recordings of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* and Saint-Saëns’s *Organ Symphony*. As he says: ‘It was my dream as a student to perform on appropriate instruments. In the history of interpretation, people are now ready for it.’

The orchestra he has got together for the Stravinsky venture ‘is very typical, maybe the most typical for that time in Paris’. So there are narrow-bore French trumpets, the Gallic timbres of the woodwind and, of course, the strings are gut – ‘important’, Roth says, ‘for poetry in the music’. The particular balance that these tone qualities and colours achieve is part of Roth’s fascination with what he does. ‘We like to make our minds as close as possible to when the original rehearsals were started,’ he says. ‘We rehearse to find the roots of a piece.’ If there are technical limitations as compared with the developments in orchestral instruments over the past 100 years,



1. Ultra-modern setting, authentic instruments: Les Siècles musicians in Cité de la Musique

2. François-Xavier Roth: likes to capture the atmosphere and acoustics of a venue

3. Same players, very different venue, a quick patch for the horns: one week on, in Laon Cathedral

they, too, are part of the philosophy. 'We create every project as if we were actually in that period. Using modern instruments you have to fight to find the right orchestral balance. In the instruments we use the colours blend.'

It's not just because it is more financially viable to record live than to go into a studio that Les Siècles discs are done *in situ*, but also because Roth likes to preserve on his recordings the particular atmosphere and acoustics of different venues. The concert in Paris goes like a dream. But there are, inevitably, audience coughs and shuffles that need to be eliminated. So it's off to the editing suite with the producer, Jiri Heger, who has engineered many a recording. He has used 14 microphones, a pair above the conductor and others spotted around the orchestra. He has the dress rehearsal and a performance to choose from, and by deft comparisons of the several takes and by dint of mixing from the various microphone channels – 200 edit points, according to Heger – he arrives at a feasible finished result. But there is a problem: in just a few bars the horns have a slight issue with intonation. A patch is called for, but that has to be done, for logistical and schedule reasons, elsewhere than in the Cité de la Musique, and in fact in the very different, more reverberant acoustics of the cathedral in Laon, Picardy. It's a snag, because the orchestral seating is also different, but will the listener's ear detect it? To be fair, I won't even tell you where it is. **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 66

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROGER DO MINH, M. DEWEUSSCHER



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Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony

Conductor *Manfred Honeck* shares his radical thoughts on the work with Philip Clark

Oatmeal and banana; jam and tea and toast: breakfast with Manfred Honeck a hop-and-a-skip away from the Royal Albert Hall where, as part of Prom 68, he will tonight lead his Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5.

But he wants to clear something up about his new CD of that same symphony: 'This is a live recording. In fact, it was my debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony in 2006. I had to ask myself, would a new studio recording have been better? But no, I thought the chemistry between myself and the orchestra is incredible here. I was very happy to have it released.' Listening to the recording, I hear a deeply personal Tchaikovsky Fifth: rethought, uncluttered, kicking against perceived wisdom. 'Well, people say we have to interpret it in a Russian way, but my question is, what does this mean? Listen to the recordings of Gergiev, Mravinsky or Svetlanov and there are worlds between them – so what is Russian?'

Honeck answers his own question by dropping me deep inside the score. 'Traditionally the finale is considered the most difficult movement,' he asserts. 'What to do? It's loud and it gallops towards the last pages. But that's not true. If you take time to properly work out the folkloristic elements, a different piece appears. There are hidden subtleties: the strings during the first four bars are marked

'Tchaikovsky introduces this strange, nasal sound on the horn. It's a warning that not everything in life is beautiful'

forte, then, only in bar five, Tchaikovsky moves to *fortissimo*; in the first four bars the section leaders play, then Tchaikovsky introduces all the strings in bar five. Balalaika bands work in the same way – a small group, then it's like 20,000 balalaikas are playing.

'I became fascinated in this reference to balalaikas. Twenty bars later, the woodwind have this same "balalaika" material, but normally you can't hear it because of the long notes in the strings and syncopated figures in the French horns. So I changed the dynamics. I felt it was right that the woodwind should echo what went before. Later, before the recapitulation, there's a 30-bar transition section which Tchaikovsky marks *più animato* and then, suddenly, *tempo primo*. The tradition is to slow down through the transition and then jump suddenly into the *tempo primo*; which is fine, except that's not what Tchaikovsky wrote. I go quicker through the transition, and by doing



Manfred Honeck produces a deeply personal Fifth

that suddenly a Russian dance appears. It tends to sound like Bruckner or Brahms otherwise, but observing what Tchaikovsky writes produces a typical Russian dance style – the sort of music played on a balalaika.'

Gluing the symphony together is a melodic sequence, sketched out during the opening moments, that recurs in various emotionally pent-up guises throughout. I wonder how Honeck deals with the apparent danger that this so-called 'fate motif' could be perceived as a theatrical, not a musical, gesture? 'The music must do it,' he explains. 'When the motif appears as the climax of the second movement, Tchaikovsky makes a personal statement – "I cannot live like this". He writes triplets, then quavers, and puts accents on the quavers to emphasise: there is nowhere the intensity of feeling can go now.'

'In the *Andante cantabile* there is a similar sense of "We dance but this can't be reality." He's talking about the second movement: French horn drizzled over supporting strings, usually a melt-in-the-ear window of release after the uneasy first movement. Not here. 'The French horn is muted; why would Tchaikovsky want that? I think it's because he wanted the horn to be a disturbing element. It's a comfortable Russian dance. Everything seems so nice. But he introduces this strange, nasal sound on the horn. It doesn't fit. It's a warning that not everything in life is beautiful. There's something coming.'

And what comes at the end might astonish some. Most conductors broaden the final few bars but Honeck does the opposite. 'The only reason to broaden the tempo is to give the symphony a heroic ending. But Tchaikovsky's markings indicate that, no, the tempo must be quickened. He didn't want to have an overly confident ending. But thinking about the rest of the symphony, why would he?' **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 66

The historical view

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Letter to patron Nadezhda von Meck (c1888)

'I have become convinced that this symphony is unsuccessful. There is something repulsive about it, a certain excess of gaudiness and insincerity, artificiality. And the public instinctively recognises this. The ovations I received were directed at my previous work.'

Compton Mackenzie

Gramophone editorial (May 1939)

'In Constant Lambert's handling of the Fifth Symphony of Tchaikovsky I seemed to detect a deliberate attempt to put it in its place. I could almost have vowed that he had rapped with his baton the knuckles of the first violins to warn them against indulging in the slightest display of emotion.'

Valery Gergiev

Interview on Carnegie Hall's website (2011)

'The Fifth is maybe the most perfect symphony Tchaikovsky ever composed. You don't expect Beethoven symphonies to take you to a theatrical world; but in Tchaikovsky you immediately imagine costume, colours – it makes you think immediately of theatre.'



QUIZ



Arnold Schoenberg:
an influence on my
own works and those
of my contemporaries

Who am I?

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I was born in a city that graphically resembles my compositions. Strangely, any visual maps are used to disorientate aurally.

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I have written a piece for someone who has wept on Schoenberg's grave, is unacquainted with George VI's coronation and is the annual practical joker.

Take a walk from Village Square to Tompkins Square Park. You'll find all the reasons for my aesthetic decisions.

I should have gone furniture shopping in 1965; perhaps my number of published works would have rivalled those of some more prolific forebears.

My friends included contemporaries from the worlds of visual arts and literature – and these proved to be great inspirations, too.

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OCTOBER ISSUE WINNER

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Welcome to *stravinsky's* world

His influence on 20th-century music was immense, but what impact did Stravinsky the man have on those who knew him? Philip Clark finds out

Let's talk about Igor Stravinsky, about how those who worked with him see the great man 40 years after his death. But what to ask this stellar line-up of extraordinary personalities whose lives were, fleetingly or comprehensively, interwoven with his? There's an obvious question – what was Stravinsky the man like? Marilyn Horne reveals something about the minutiae of Stravinsky's dinner-time habits, then informs us unambiguously that 'he was easily the greatest composer of the 20th century'.

Pianist Philippe Entremont admires Stravinsky's music but tells us he found working with him traumatic. Stravinsky's record producer John McClure paints a character portrait of an unexpectedly vulnerable elderly man, capable of temper tantrums but desperately concerned to secure his legacy on record as his health was failing. Michael Tilson Thomas was fortunate to meet

Stravinsky as a young, emerging conductor in Los Angeles; clarinetist Stanley Drucker, pianist Charles Rosen and choral conductor Gregg Smith all take slightly differing views on the thorny question of Stravinsky's own conducting. But they agree on one thing – working with a figure of Stravinsky's unparalleled cultural muscle marks you for life. The ripples are indelible.

And by interviewing these erstwhile colleagues, and taking the opportunity to relisten to Stravinsky pieces I hadn't heard for many years – and pondering what to write here, assuming that no one needs to be told again how scandalous *The Rite of Spring* was back in the day – another Stravinsky emerges. Time has moved on. There are no first-hand witnesses left to the young Stravinsky, that dapper, moustached, enigmatic even to himself, revolutionary who composed *Petrushka*, *Rite* and *Les noces* during the first two decades of the past century. Like many central European composers – including Schoenberg, Hindemith and Milhaud – Stravinsky emigrated to the United States when the grim inevitability of unfolding events in Europe became clear. He arrived in 1939 and became a naturalised American citizen in 1945; everyone here knew that 'American' Stravinsky, himself sometimes uncertain about how to contain the weight of his earlier reputation.

Although a pop image of Stravinsky suggests that he was the most modern composer who's ever walked the planet, 'modern' needs qualifying. What kind of modernist was he? Unlike Edgard Varèse, another one-time Paris-based expat, Stravinsky's music was never 'futuristic'. Varèse gave his pieces quasi-scientific titles, while his *Poème électronique* switched electronic music on. If electronics outlined an obvious pathway for 'progressives', Stravinsky never showed any interest. In 1945 he wrote his *Ebony Concerto* for the instrumentation of a jazz big band, just as the swing era was floundering. Apart from the occasional telltale dedication – to JFK, Dylan Thomas or Aldous Huxley – no Stravinsky work ever commented explicitly on the wider world around him. And his johnny-come-lately conversion to atonality happened just as 12-tone composition was now reckoned to be the domain of university boffins who taught it as a guaranteed way of producing a 'modern' sound, thereby killing its creative edge stone dead.

As Stravinsky wrote 12-tone works like *Requiem Canticles* and *Introitus*, composers as ideologically adrift as Leonard Bernstein, Louis Andriessen and Steve Reich were holding up his early tonal music as a – make that *the* – way forward. Then the paradoxes run deeper. As Rosen explains, Stravinsky imposed himself absolutely on to 12-tone technique. But far from grasping at relevance, or placating those who once found his neo-classical pieces regressive and worthless, atonality became his portal into an 'invented' ancientism; the credo of '12 numbers' linking into Stravinsky's love of Gesualdo, of smells-and-bells mystic religious rites. Milton Babbitt premiered atonal works at Princeton University; Stravinsky premiered his in St Mark's, Venice.



Being paradoxical and contradictory is a very human trait, and I like that Stravinsky provokes questions that will never be fully answered. Stravinsky's music is ultimately about Stravinsky; about the intrigue of the composer's craft; about making sense of a world that revered his early classics, and would have been happier with more *Rites* and *Petrushkas* than any new atonal work, while recognising that the creative imperative which licensed that music was long gone. It's about the right note in the right context, the right note making the wrong context sound right, the wrong context making the right note sound wrong, the right context elevating the wrongest note imaginable to perfection; Stravinsky engaged in the world, or not engaged at all, Stravinsky ahead of his time, Stravinsky always with one ear to the past, Stravinsky the leader who wasn't much interested in leading, Stravinsky the new-music sage who listened and learnt and sucked in any music around him.

Let's talk about Stravinsky, beginning with conductor Michael Tilson Thomas at one of those Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles, a recurring time and place throughout these interviews, where Stravinsky premiered 13 pieces and his assistant Robert Craft conducted music old and new. Let's talk about Stravinsky, knowing the best we can hope to achieve is wild speculation about his motivation and ways of doing. But let's enjoy rolling with the conversation. Personalities may fade but the music always beckons us back.

Crafting his art: Stravinsky, seated, with American conductor Robert Craft in 1962, working on the score of *The Flood*

STRAVINSKY

The four phases of his development

Finding the language (1898-1908)

Stravinsky's formative period, amalgamating influences from Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, etc

Key works

Symphony in E flat
Scherzo fantastique
Fireworks

The breakthrough years (1910-18)

Stravinsky relocates to Paris; the early classic ballets and 'folklore'-based pieces

Key works

The Firebird
Petrushka
The Rite of Spring
Les noces
Renard
The Soldier's Tale

Neo-classical consolidation (1920-51)

Stravinsky reinventing/reimagining Baroque/Classical sources; remaking tonality from the inside

Key works

Pulcinella
Symphonies of Wind Instruments
Symphony of Psalms
Concerto in E flat, 'Dumbarton Oaks'
Symphony in Three Movements
The Rake's Progress

Modernist/12-tone period (1952-69)

Beginning tentatively, then gathering force with fully frontal 12-tone works, Stravinsky engages with Schoenberg, then Boulez and Stockhausen

Key works

Cantata
Agon
Movements for Piano and Orchestra
Variations (Aldous Huxley in memoriam)
Requiem Canticles

Stravinsky...by those who knew him



Unstoppable force:
Stravinsky conducting on
January 9, 1971 – just three
months before he died

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS

*Conductor; worked with Stravinsky at
the LA Monday Evening Concert series*

My parents had a 78rpm recording of *Petrushka* which had been played so often part of the shellac had worn out, allowing tufts of felt to poke through the surfaces. *Petrushka* was a family favourite because my Russian grandmother knew all the tunes. These tunes were also a kind of forfeit in a popular family game, a combination of Double Solitaire and building a house of cards. If you played a wrong card, or knocked over the house, you had to go under the table, crouch on one foot and sing a few bars of the 'Coachmen's Dance', crowing like a rooster.

When I first saw Stravinsky conduct I was about 10. He made his way to the stage in short steps and presented himself to the audience with a very characteristic bow somewhat in the manner of a dancer. He began to conduct the complete *Le rossignol* and, as the opening bars floated over us, I was entranced and amazed that this music was by the same composer whose rambunctious ballets I knew almost by heart. His conducting was an angular tangle suggesting a multi-armed Hindu deity. The swoops and jabs were precise, rhythmic, gestural; the same no matter the size or scope of the work.

These qualities were consistent in the many performances I saw and later participated in. At a concert, rehearsal or recording session, Stravinsky's manner was elegant and aristocratic, very much like older St Petersburg artists I had met. Whether he was making a musical point, relishing a special word or taking out a hard candy or small pencil from his vest pocket, he was like a court jeweller pleased with his precision and command. Gesture is a word that

keeps coming to mind. In his gruff singing – I'm so glad I heard him sing – and in his conducting, there was an urgent continuity interrupted only when he was obliged to lick a left-hand finger to turn the page. This almost choreographic concept of phrasing is central to his music in all of its styles.

Not enough Stravinsky is heard. Far too rarely one hears pieces like *Four Etudes*, *Apollo*, *The Fairy's Kiss*, *Symphony in C*, *Agon* or *Requiem Canticles*. *Symphony in Three Movements* gets more play because of Stravinsky's big finish and big-band gestures. He made his breakthrough with rhythmic/folkloric scores, but thereafter his creativity led him to styles which were essentially more lyric, abstract and economical; which revealed his supreme gift for choosing the right notes. I have special affection for *Agon* as, in many ways, it is a book of musical souvenirs of the Los Angeles Monday Evening Concerts which Stravinsky often attended and where 13 new works were premiered. These concerts presented many first Los Angeles performances of Gesualdo, Monteverdi, Schütz, Webern, Boulez, and abstracted traces in *Agon* are clear.

A memory I treasure is sitting backstage with Stravinsky at one of those concerts as he listened to the premiere of his 'The Owl and the Pussy-Cat', and then followed along with the manuscript of Beethoven's Op 111 Sonata as I performed it. Afterwards he said, 'Yes, my dear, it's all acoustics. The right hand is up so high, the left far below. The whole piano ringing with the resonance the depressed pedal creates. How curious that a man who is totally deaf should be so interested in acoustics.' It was a characteristic epigram, and an inspiration to experience the man's original and searching mind so personally.

'As a conductor, Stravinsky's swoops and jabs were precise, rhythmic, gestural; the same no matter the size or scope of the work'

► SUZANNE FARRELL

Ballerina; principal dancer at New York City Ballet, where she worked closely with Stravinsky and George Balanchine

I met Stravinsky in 1963 when I was rehearsing *Movements for Piano and Orchestra*. It was my first big role, and I was suddenly thrown into learning the steps in place of Diana Adams, who was pregnant. During the rehearsal, a documentary for West German television was being filmed, and they wanted to capture footage of Stravinsky watching the rehearsal. Afterwards, Balanchine introduced me to Stravinsky and I was in awe. Much later, I heard that Stravinsky had asked who I was, and Balanchine answered: 'Igor Fyodorovich, this is Suzanne Farrell. Just been born.'

When we were working on the first version of *Variations (Aldous Huxley in memoriam)* in 1966 Stravinsky was again in New York and George invited him to watch a rehearsal. He brought out a little stool for Stravinsky and placed it centre stage. Only the work light was on and there was nobody in the audience; it was like a little party and I was the dancing girl – as in: 'Bring on the dancing girl!'

George said, 'Suzi, do some *Variations* for Igor'. I began the five-minute solo, and they talked in Russian and seemed to be having a good, conspiratorial time. I didn't know what was going on, and then Balanchine asked me to do a bit of the very difficult cadenza from his *Ballet Imperial*, based on Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto. I did, and they talked more. I went to my dressing room. Shortly after, there was a knock on my door and it was George. He thanked me again, and told me Stravinsky enjoyed my dancing. I said, 'I'd love to tell him how much I enjoy dancing to his music.' 'If you run, you can catch up to him,' George replied. Stravinsky was slowly walking toward the theatre exit, cane in hand. As I ran after him I called out: 'Mr Stravinsky, Mr Stravinsky, I want to tell you how much I enjoy dancing to your music.' He patted me on the head and knowingly said, 'I can tell. Thank you, dear.'



Balanchine's muse: Suzanne Farrell inspired the choreographer to create more than 20 ballets for her, including Stravinsky's *Movements for Piano and Orchestra*

'George said, "Suzi, do some *Variations* for Igor". I began the five-minute solo, and they talked in Russian and seemed to be having a good, conspiratorial time together'

STANLEY DRUCKER

Lead clarinetist of the New York Philharmonic, 1948-2009; played under Stravinsky's baton on several occasions

Before my tenure, Stravinsky had already appeared many times with the New York Philharmonic. In 1946 he premiered the *Symphony in Three Movements* with the orchestra and during my time there were concerts in 1957, during Dimitri Mitropoulos's last season, which featured *Perséphone* and *Petrushka*, and in 1966 a Stravinsky festival when he conducted *Symphony in Three Movements* and *Symphony of Psalms*. He came as an honoured presence.

Stravinsky wrote remarkably well for the clarinet. There are the wonderful *Three Pieces* for solo clarinet and the very prominent part for clarinet in *The Soldier's Tale* – and, of course, the many passages in *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* which illustrate the brilliance the clarinet is capable of. He certainly used the instrument wisely.

I felt Stravinsky was very human, a person who could be approached. One could certainly ask him about phrasing, or an articulation or accent. Some of his markings are very individual; an inflection, a wedge or accent in Stravinsky has a completely different meaning to the same symbol in, for instance, Copland. He exhibited enthusiasm and verve on the podium, a kind of joy that was transmitted, although not always with accuracy of the rhythms. He didn't have that conductorial capacity for forward drive which a Bernstein or Boulez could achieve in the same music. Many composers came to the Philharmonic to conduct their music during the same time. In his conducting, Hindemith gave out what needed to be expressed, an ability that Stravinsky could never match.

I didn't know Stravinsky in his younger years, obviously, and the pieces he conducted with the Philharmonic were generally his older pieces – classics from the 'permanent collection' – ones that weren't so taxing. Robert Craft conducted some of the more difficult, thorny works for the conductor. He had an ability to boil these late pieces down to their essence, especially rhythms that were difficult to perceive. *Petrushka* is no easy piece to conduct – but it's easier than *Symphony in Three Movements* or *Symphony in C*, where there's a certain bridging of the old positions with the new. New York being New York, I always found our audiences willing to accept these works – everything either starts in New York, or comes here eventually.

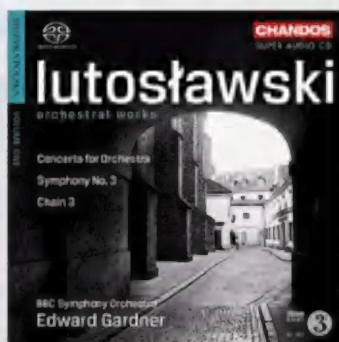
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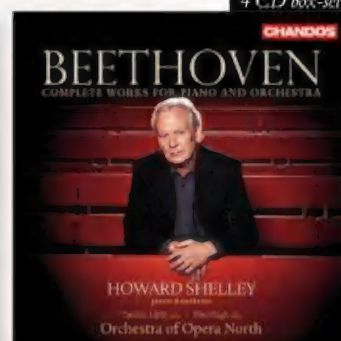
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► PHILIPPE ENTREMONT

Pianist; recorded the Capriccio and Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments with Stravinsky in 1966

I admired Stravinsky's music immensely but I worked with him when he was too old. He arrived drunk, and it was impossible to talk with him about his music. The Columbia Symphony Orchestra were fantastic, but Stravinsky followed them most of the time and then complained to them about their playing. He was giving no clear indication, and we were playing in the dark.

He was very opinionated and there was no room for discussion. He wrote his music, of course, but no composer should ignore what somebody who takes the trouble to learn their work can bring to it. A piece is like a frame; it's large enough to let the performer inside. *The Firebird* is luscious – but listening to Stravinsky conduct it, the finale sounds so cold. Very few other people play it in that manner.

'The Columbia Symphony Orchestra were fantastic, but Stravinsky followed them most of the time and then complained to them about their playing. We were in the dark'

Taking a bow: Stravinsky joins the final curtain call at the premiere of his opera *The Rake's Progress* at Venice's Teatro La Fenice on November 9, 1951



JOHN McCLURE

Record producer; produced all Stravinsky's recordings for CBS from 1959 until his death

I met Stravinsky and Bob Craft when recording Bruno Walter's Mahler *Resurrection* Symphony at Legion Hall in Hollywood, and we immediately hit it off. I'd also met a phenomenal orchestral fixer called Philip Kahgan, who had been first viola with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and fixed the Hollywood Bowl concerts, and he knew Stravinsky and Bruno Walter. He put together an amazing orchestra – which we called the Columbia Symphony Orchestra; about half LA Phil and half crackerjack studio musicians. This was the orchestra with which Walter recorded his Beethoven symphonies and Stravinsky his early *Rite of Spring* and *Petrushka*. For the Stravinsky sessions we needed extra percussion and we might have thought about using, say, a different lead trumpet, but the orchestra were amazingly consistent. Israel Baker was the concertmaster for all those sessions. He also played on *The Soldier's Tale* and, although I knew he wasn't, I could swear to God he was sight-reading. He wasn't fazed by Stravinsky at all and chewed gum all through the session.

As conductor, Stravinsky really had no problem with *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. There are a few bars I'd love to do again, but there comes a point when you realise enough is enough: this is as good as it can get. And Stravinsky, who was never entirely well, was elderly. He'd had a stroke and walked with a limp. He had a condition that gives you an excess of red corpuscles and, depending on where he was, had two doctors with utterly different approaches to treatment. His doctor in LA told him: 'Drink plenty Scotch, it's the best thing.' Then, in New York, he'd fall under the regime of another doctor who banned alcohol and told him very clearly what he could, and couldn't, have.

When he recorded *The Soldier's Tale*, I spliced up a dummy version which he immediately rejected. 'Absolutely not. We do it once more.' You can't argue with that. He came into the studio again and did it perfectly without sweat or effort – and much faster; he found the problem with the first version was it had been much too slow. But with Symphony in C, Symphony in Three Movements, *Petrushka*, *The Firebird* – the pieces he'd conducted around the world – he mowed them down. He rehearsed carefully in the studio, and Bob Craft took over rehearsals when Stravinsky's strength would start to dip. I'm sure Bob would deny this – he wasn't in the control room listening with Stravinsky – but Stravinsky would make a lot of criticisms of Bob's conducting, things like, 'Expect this to be much slower, or faster,' or, 'I need to hear more something here'. Stravinsky was always very specific. And listening back, I could always tell Stravinsky's takes from Bob's.

If there was a passage Stravinsky could never get absolutely right, I felt no compunction about dipping into one of Bob's rehearsal takes and dropping in a bar, or a chord. But I couldn't use anything more because the differences were enormous. Bob's *Pulcinella* must have been seven minutes shorter than Stravinsky's; but Stravinsky's was much more musical. Some people reckoned we were cheating. Bill Kraft, the percussionist on *The Soldier's Tale*, thought we were using bigger blocks of Bob's takes than we were admitting to and trying to pull the wool over people's eyes. But I really couldn't see a problem about using one bar to fix a mistake. It's not easy to put something out that's totally wrong and Stravinsky approved all the final edits. We were doing something for the future.

The newer stuff – *Movements* for piano and orchestra, *Epitaphium*, *Variations* (*Aldous Huxley in memoriam*), *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* – Stravinsky simply didn't have under his fingers, and this was the music with which Bob had total affinity. I finally credited one LP as 'conducted by Robert Craft, supervised by Igor Stravinsky' because it was only fair to Bob; the horse-trading was that for every Stravinsky piece Bob brought us to record, I had to give him a Webern, Schoenberg or Berg.



Stravinsky with Gregg Smith, whose singers created 'the right sound' for Stravinsky's music

When Stravinsky recorded with Philippe Entremont, all the cards were stacked against him. Stravinsky wanted Margrit Weber, or somebody else, and deeply resented the idea that we'd imposed Entremont on him. It was probably foolish on our part to say, 'Look, we have a signed contract artist who we think will make a good job of this'. But Entremont was in very good company – Stravinsky wanted Eudice Shapiro to record the Violin Concerto because she'd already performed it; we wanted Isaac Stern who we thought would sell more records. Thinking about it now, I'm not sure we were right about that. But Isaac had never played it before, and Stravinsky was furious.

If Stravinsky was ill, he drank. When we recorded *The Rake's Progress* at Abbey Road he was very sick. He had a towel around his neck and was sweating, and would take regular swigs from a bottle of Scotch he kept on the podium. *The Rake* had been an unequivocal success and I always felt Stravinsky was determined that this recording needed to establish its reputation and value. Yehudi Menuhin came to visit, said how wonderful it sounded and Stravinsky looked at him like he was an idiot: 'Well it's a wonderful piece, why shouldn't it sound wonderful?' I recorded all the rehearsals, too. Despite feeling like he did, Stravinsky was very sharp and would make comments every two or three minutes. We never found those rehearsal tapes – if someone could, they'd show exactly how perceptive and clear in his thoughts Stravinsky was.

It was Stravinsky's 82nd birthday and we were staying at the Savoy. There was a party and the cream – not so much of English musicians, but of English theatre – flocked there: Gielgud, Sybil Thorndike, Tony Richardson. We'd just finished a session and he was wiped out. Walking there, he held a tight grip on my arm because he couldn't move his leg.

Bernstein and Ormandy were dying to get their teeth into the early ballets and I had enough trouble justifying one recording, which we never recouped, without considering others. I thought of every excuse in the book to stall Lenny, but he never let up. At Carnegie Hall there was a particularly telling moment when Stravinsky was in town and Lenny programmed *The Rite*. I took Stravinsky backstage. Lenny was bubbling, Stravinsky was glowering. Bernstein needed constant reassurance and asked 'Well, what do you think maestro?' 'When I want *ritardando*, I write *ritardando*. Otherwise please no *ritardando*,' Stravinsky snapped. Lenny was stunned and thought about it for a minute. 'My god, I learnt this piece from the Stokowski recording,' he whispered.

'Menuhin came to Abbey Road and said how wonderful *The Rake* sounded. Stravinsky looked at him like he was an idiot: "Well it's a wonderful piece, why shouldn't it sound wonderful?"'

GREGG SMITH

Leader of Gregg Smith Singers; Stravinsky's choral conductor of choice

Robert Craft conducted the performance of *Requiem Canticles* at Stravinsky's funeral in Venice, but I helped get the chorus and orchestra together. Stravinsky's family wanted *Requiem Canticles*. My feeling is that Stravinsky always intended it – his last major work – to be performed at his funeral.

My association with Stravinsky began in 1960 when we were asked to sing *Le rossignol* for the Los Angeles Music Festival. The 'king' of choral music in LA was Roger Wagner who had a terrific choir, but Roger used to rile against contemporary music, and the festival didn't like his attitude. I came along, this young upstart of a choral director, and the festival hired me over Roger. I had a love for the music and was gung-ho to do it. Eventually Roger's singers started to defect.

I remember going to Stravinsky's house in Wetherly Drive, just off Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, for the first time when we were working on *Les noces*. I rang the bell and he came to the door, this little gnome-like guy smiling broadly. In his library was a photograph of a funeral gondola procession in Venice, which turned out to be Diaghilev's funeral. Can you imagine what I felt like in 1971 being part of the equivalent procession for Stravinsky?

The Gregg Smith Singers had the right kind of sound for Stravinsky. The first time we did *Les noces*, we sang it in English. But when we learnt the Russian it was much better. When you get the Russian, then you get the colour right and the rhythm is already there. Which doesn't mean Stravinsky's rhythms are easy. We needed to pay attention to the accents and rhythmic inflections more than anything else.

When we did the first performance of 'The dove descending breaks the air' in 1963, at a Monday Evening Concert, again our sound was right. What Stravinsky wanted was a sound that had clarity yet body. For *Requiem Canticles* this very clear, precise sound is essential because the choral sections are so very short. That piece really reflected his new attitude. Compared to *Les noces*, I don't hear the Russian influence there as much as I hear the 'modernism'. With his conversion to 12-tone writing, he was reflecting what was going on. He was very aware of Boulez – a lot of *sympatico* there, you might say.

‘Composers who turned to the 12-tone technique, if they were any good, made it their own. In *Movements*, Stravinsky didn’t try for the spectacular tone colour of *Petrushka*, but it still sounds entirely Stravinskian’

► CHARLES ROSEN

Pianist; recorded Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata and Serenade in 1960, and Movements for piano and orchestra in 1961

I went to see Stravinsky before I recorded the Piano Sonata and the Serenade in A because I thought there might be mistakes in the published scores. Boulez once told me that Stravinsky’s scores, alongside Schoenberg’s and Debussy’s, were littered with mistakes and certainly I’d found inconsistencies in both works. When I arrived, a young composer friend of Stravinsky’s was there called Alexei Haieff. Apparently Stravinsky had called him because he was nervous about this young American pianist coming to talk about pieces that were decades old: ‘I can’t remember anything about them,’ he’d said. I asked Stravinsky about certain notes and chords. He spent a long time trying to figure it all out, but I’m not sure he gave me the right answers, frankly.

When I recorded *Movements* I said that, if Stravinsky preferred to speak French, I could speak it almost as well as English. He said he couldn’t remember any language apart from English, although, at least when I was speaking to him, he didn’t speak in one language. It was a mixture of French and English, maybe a little German – a language he’d assembled himself.

Margrit Weber, who commissioned *Movements*, thought the piece was too short, but Stravinsky told her that if he did any more work on it then it would certainly get shorter. It was not the happiest session because Stravinsky didn’t know *Movements* as a conductor. Craft complained in his book that I had trouble following Stravinsky’s beat. But Craft was sitting directly behind me and knew damn well that Stravinsky’s beats fluctuated; he would beat 1, 2, 3 and then put his hand to his ear waiting for the fourth beat. The producer, John McClure, said we should have organised a public performance because, playing it for an audience, we would have learnt what everybody else was doing. Stravinsky wasn’t happy and, at the end of the session, said ‘We did not portray the piece’.

Movements is very beautiful. He didn’t try for the spectacular pianistic tone colour effects in *Movements* that he achieved in the second scene of *Petrushka*, music originally intended for a piano concerto. But it sounds entirely Stravinskian. Composers who turned to the 12-tone technique, if they were any good, made the technique their own. Stravinsky doesn’t

sound like Schoenberg; Webern doesn’t sound like Schoenberg; Berg doesn’t sound like Schoenberg or Webern. And I’m not even certain I know what the tone row is in *Movements*; when I played it, I was interested in the phrasing and dynamics, which are very extraordinary.

The last movement of Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata is based upon the Beethoven Op 54 sonata – actually upon a *mis*understanding of the finale. *Allegretto* for Beethoven is a relatively slow tempo; the proper tempo is about crotchet=76 but most pianists – Pollini, Schnabel, Richter – play it at 144. It’s the least popular of the Beethoven sonatas and I’ve often wondered if that’s why Stravinsky chose it.

In one of his lectures, he said, ‘I use classical phrases the way I used folk tunes’. The way he used folk sources in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* – it sounds like Stravinsky. It never sounds like folk material. For him it was all material. Elliott Carter told me he once asked Stravinsky if he used models and was told: ‘I always have a model.’ I don’t know anyone who’s noticed that the last movement of the Piano Sonata is based on Beethoven’s Op 54. But Stravinsky, of course, expected everyone to hear that the slow movement was related to the style of Bach. He had a more troubled relationship with Beethoven than Bach. You see, Stravinsky springs from Debussy, who was the first composer to free everyone of Beethovenian development. Until Debussy, everybody was using Beethoven development technique by sequence. Debussy got rid of the tonal structures which you get from a sequence and enabled Stravinsky to compose *Rite* and *Les noces*. When Beethoven wrote *Fidelio*, perhaps he expected you to notice that the big aria in E flat major, with three obbligato horns, is obviously related to the big aria in *Così fan tutte*, in E major with two obbligato horns. Perhaps he expected you to notice, then shut up about it.

But Stravinsky’s relationship to the Classical tradition was different: he wasn’t competing. Certainly in *Jeu de cartes* he expected you to recognise quotations from Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, Beethoven’s Fifth and Ravel’s *La valse*. The opening theme of *Jeu de cartes* is an eight-bar phrase of which the seventh bar has been removed; then, when he quotes Rossini, it’s an eight-bar phrase with the seventh bar removed. What he’s doing is reducing the other composers to his own system. With *Movements*, too, he imposed himself over the system. ►

Friends in high places: Stravinsky (far right) with (from L-R) his wife Vera and President and First Lady Kennedy on January 23, 1962 in Washington



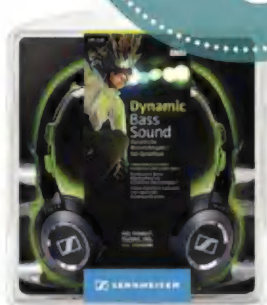
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► MARILYN HORNE

Mezzo-soprano; discovered by Stravinsky in 1956, and later sang Oedipus Rex

Hitler had a big thing to do with it, but also the good weather – in Los Angeles, where I grew up, it was not unusual for young performers to end up working with fabulous composers because so many of them migrated there. My first contact with Stravinsky was when I was hired to sing some of his songs for the Monday Evening Concerts.

I was 19 and didn't speak a word of Russian, and had certainly never sung a note in Russian. I went to Stravinsky's house where he taught me the Russian, every syllable, very patiently. We sat together and he enunciated all the vowel and consonant sounds, going 'AWWWWSSSH' and 'AWWWWARK', and I learnt it by ear. Stravinsky and Robert Craft liked what I did and suddenly I was being asked to perform lots of other music, not just Stravinsky. With Bob, I did the first performance in Los Angeles of the Monteverdi *Vespers*; Schoenberg and Webern, too.

We usually rehearsed at Stravinsky's home in Wetherly Drive. I was allowed to see the inner sanctum of Stravinsky's studio. The Russians decorate with tinsel that to us looks like Christmas; there was tinsel draped all around the room. I was invited to dinner many times after rehearsals and got to know his wife Vera very well, who was a wonderfully warm woman. But my big 'in' was through Stravinsky's Russian cook, Yevgenia Petrovna: she loved me. The food was simple but delicious, and Stravinsky always ate dinner wearing a beret because he was afraid of the draft. He was a complete hypochondriac. The conversation once turned to health and operations. I asked Stravinsky if he'd always been interested in the medical world. He took a sip of soup, beret sitting elegantly on his head, and said with a kind of relish: 'I adore medicine'. Sometimes Aldous Huxley might turn up for dinner and I didn't just sit and listen. I was young and thought they needed to hear my opinions, too!

With Robert Craft, we entered into a big project to perform and record Gesualdo and we recorded 65 madrigals and motets. Gesualdo wrote practically all his madrigals for five voices, and Bob found some wonderful motets that required a couple of bass voices. But the extra parts had been lost and Stravinsky reconstructed them. One of my most prized memories is Stravinsky coming out of his studio with strips of paper, the ink still wet, and handing them out to the singers. He was terribly interested in the project, and always sat in the audience when we performed them.

I was a soprano when I first knew Stravinsky, and recorded *Oedipus Rex* for Italian radio; but I was already flirting with low notes. I also sang *Oedipus* with Stravinsky in Canada for a television performance, and made my debut at La Scala in 1969 singing Jocasta. It's a huge part, beautifully paced dramatically, and there are big, big scenes; Stravinsky was absolutely a man of the theatre. Unfortunately in Canada he got sick and Bob Craft took over for the

performance. I hate to use the word 'dry' to describe Stravinsky's conducting because it's a much overused word about him. But I would say it's the right word – it was dry, largely accurate, but he never looked up from the score. I'd laugh when I'd see him conduct *The Firebird* for the millionth time, looking hard into the score to see what was coming next. But, look, he was easily the greatest composer of the 20th century and the fact he was still alive and able to conduct his own music brought another kind of authority.

I was with him in Venice when *Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis* was introduced, with Stravinsky conducting. That piece is for tenor and baritone solo so I wasn't involved and sang some old music with Bob: Monteverdi, Schütz. During *Canticum sacrum*, I sat next to Nadia Boulanger in St Mark's who said, 'Well, he's always 25 years ahead of everyone'. I remember the ambience created by huge candles burning in every corner; and the Cardinal was there who later became Pope John.

Some of the last music Stravinsky wrote is dedicated to me – *Two Sacred Songs of Hugo Wolf*, from the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, which he orchestrated for three clarinets, two horns and string quintet. They're fabulous songs. Stravinsky never wrote a Requiem as such. He was superstitious and wrote *Requiem Canticles* instead, but these Wolf songs are true breast-beating poetry, full of Catholic associations with hanging on the cross. Unfortunately, I never recorded them, but I did perform them in Berlin. I remember Horowitz was in the audience and the click of cameras as everyone was photographing him.

Later I moved to Europe and worked with Stravinsky less, but always kept up contact. What was really important for me was this: I was good at popular music and could easily have gone down that route. But Stravinsky never took the easy way out, and that influenced me to take life seriously, too. ⑥



Close collaboration: Stravinsky with Jean Cocteau (left) at a performance of *Oedipus Rex*, for which Cocteau wrote the libretto, in Paris on May 19, 1952

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Bugallo and Williams survey all Stravinsky's four-hand versions of orchestral works, from the neo-classical *Dumbarton Oaks* to the serial *Movements*.



'Stravinsky in America'

LSO / Michael Tilson Thomas

RCA (4) 09026 68865-2

MTT traces Stravinsky's American years, beginning with his arrangement of *The Star-Spangled Banner* and finally arriving at the ugly beauty of the *Huxley Variations*.

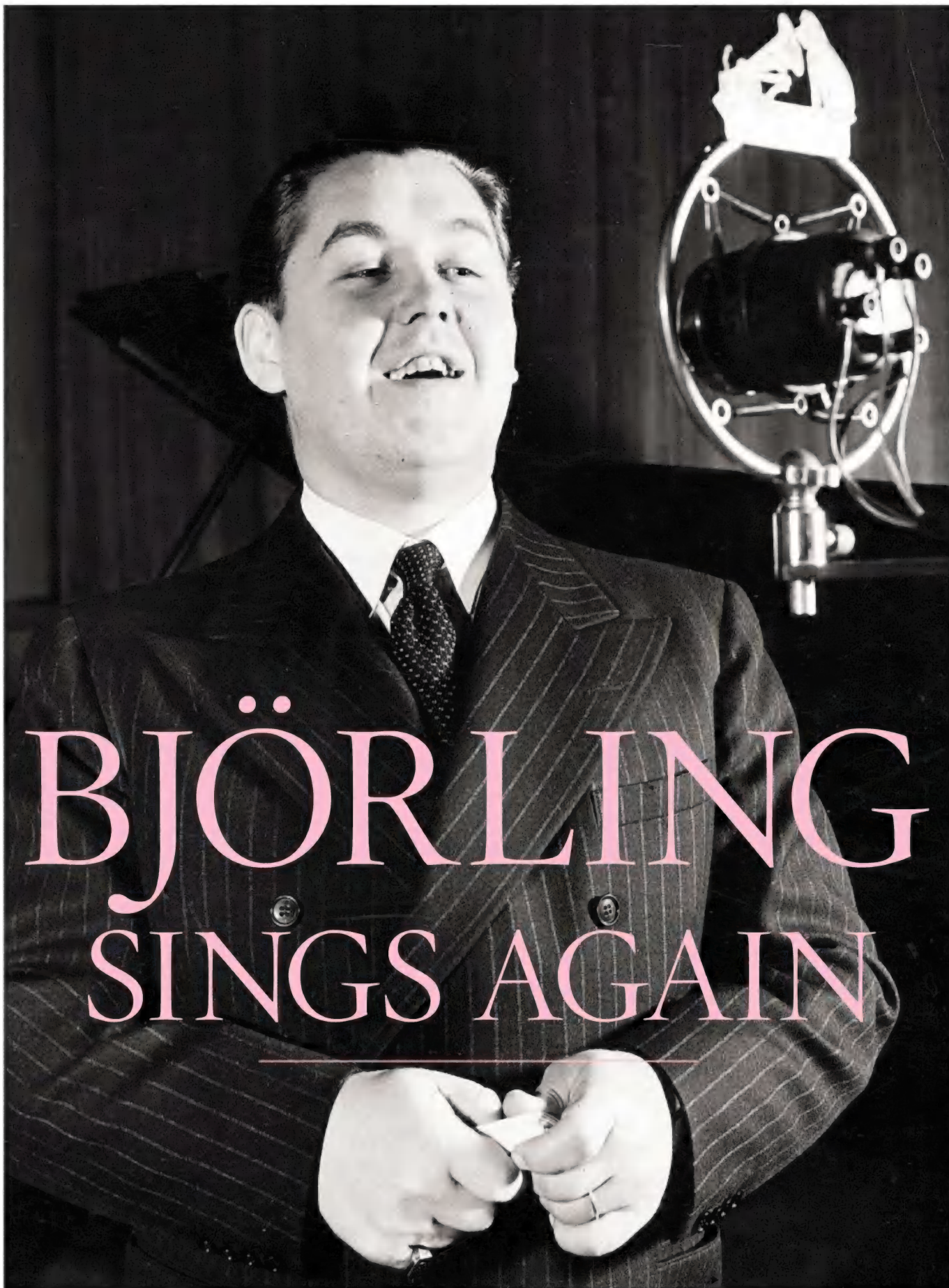


'Boulez Conducts Stravinsky'

Various ensembles / Boulez

DG (6) 477 8730GB6

Boulez's *Firebird* and *Rite* are as authoritative as you'd expect but this set also contains songs and a funky *Ebony Concerto*.



Forty years in front of the microphones. 650 recordings – including 240 from the studio. In this, his centenary year, *Jussi Björling* lives on through his vast recorded legacy

Words by Mike Ashman

That old commercial law of marketing popular music recordings – ‘you ain’t great till you’re late’ – was true and false in equal proportions with regard to the gramophone legacy of Swedish tenor Johan Jonatan Björling, whose centenary is celebrated this year. By the time he died in 1960, five months short of his 50th birthday, Björling had been regularly in front of the microphones for 40 years, completing more than 240 studio recordings. He straddled the technology from acoustic 78s to stereo LPs. He was popular with both a specialist and a general listening public, and his records sold.

A stream of reissues began immediately. By the early 1970s the 10 complete opera sets and recitals made for RCA in the final decade of his career had been restored. But this was a mere prelude to the deluge of new ‘old’ material that has appeared continuously in the half-century since his death. Stimulated by the coming of the CD, the opening up of archives at radio stations and opera houses (especially in Stockholm and New York), relaxation of copyright laws and a flexible attitude on the part of his family, the Björling discography has almost doubled in size. The 1993 edition of Harald Henrysson’s landmark reference work *A Jussi Björling Phonography* already estimated that ‘JB’s recorded legacy now consists of more than 650 items, including at least 36 complete (or almost complete) opera and three oratorio recordings – not surprisingly, the material from live performances and broadcasts is much larger than was recorded in the gramophone studio’.

Björling began making records as a boy treble with his brothers Olle and Gösta: acoustic 78s made in New York in February 1920 under the name of the Björling Boys’ Ensemble. Naxos’s ‘Jussi Björling Collection, Vol 2’ has resurrected two

numbers in which you may just be able to make out the young Jussi. He started in his own right as a tenor in September 1929 with HMV, at first in romantic songs and then (after the launch of his stage career) in operatic arias. From December 1929 the conductor Nils Grevillius became a regular recording and concert partner – ‘extremely inspiring’, noted Björling in his 1945 autobiography, *Med bagaget i strupen* (‘My Voice is my Luggage’) – and continued to be so throughout the tenor’s life. Along the way, in 1932–33, Björling recorded vocals for 12 Swedish jazz titles under the pseudonym Erik Odde. He sounds uncannily relaxed and stylish – no trace of a ‘classical’ artist slumming it. The records were remastered in 2005–06 for a further edition of Naxos’s Björling collection (Vol 6). From 1936 onwards Björling became an international HMV artist, recording alternately in the original language for the company worldwide and in Swedish for the Scandinavian market. He continued with EMI throughout the war, moving to RCA Victor in 1950 (his recordings were therefore distributed in Europe first by EMI, then by Decca) for a series of complete operas and recitals.

The move to EMI’s international Red Label in the 1930s followed Björling’s debuts in Prague and Vienna. Cautiously excited about ‘the young Swedish tenor making his bow to British gramophiles’, *Gramophone* was there at the start, with a review in March 1937 of HMV DA1548, ‘Recondita armonia’ and ‘La donna è mobile’ (conducted by Grevillius, currently available in EMI’s Björling ‘Icon’ collection). ‘I might be rash enough to speak of HMV having discovered a “new Caruso”,’ wrote the anonymous reviewer, probably Compton Mackenzie himself. ‘I disclaim any such prophecy; but I do say that a young singer with such a splendid voice and obvious skill and intelligence should go very far indeed if he takes himself and



Björling backstage in a production of *Don Carlos* in 1950



Jussi, centre, plays Rodolfo at Covent Garden in 1960 only months before he died

his art seriously.' A follow-up disc of 'Celeste Aida' brought reservations about the newcomer's dynamics and Italian pronunciation but an American contributor to the Letters page was soon bemoaning Björling's exclusion from the magazine's 'new outstanding tenors' feature.

Something from the roles of Björling's international debut was made available in 1994 on Volume 4 of Koch Schwann's Vienna State Opera Live Recordings (*Aida* from 1936, *Faust* and *Pagliacci* from 1937). John Steane found here 'some wonderful moments, best of all probably the young Radames; lyrical, poetic and ardent in his recitative and aria. He was to sing and record the role many more times but never, I think, with quite the freshness of feeling and imagination caught here.'

Like this release, the great majority of the 'new' Björling performances issued since 1960 come from live concerts and opera performances. Their interest lies in alternate performances of a familiar, quite small number of roles and songs. After 1939 Björling reduced his stage repertoire from the 53 roles he sang before the war in Stockholm to just 16, favouring *La bohème*, *Faust*, *Il trovatore* and *Rigoletto* the most. A cache of such material from Stockholm – from Swedish Radio or the late-1950s in-house recordings made by Valter Valentin – has included two *Il trovatore* performances (Bluebell ABCD016 from 1960, Caprice CAP22051 from 1957), excerpts from *Manon Lescaut*, *Cavalleria rusticana* – the Lola is Björling's American sister-in-law, Bette Björling – and *Pagliacci* (Bluebell ABCD028), and duets and scenes from *La bohème* and *Roméo et Juliette* with the soprano Hjärdís Schymberg (Bluebell ABCD013).

'His open-air concerts at the Gröna Lund amusement park are like the Three Tenors done by one tenor with about half the fuss and three times the impact'

Singing in his native language (as he would continue to do also for much of his recital work), Björling conveys a naturalness that is sometimes lacking in his well-studied Italian and French performances for RCA or EMI. Those who find his emotions cold or remote will be surprised by the directness of his conversation with Mimì or his outpouring of love for Juliette. His last-ever Des Grieux shows the voice still in an amazingly pure state, unworn by age or misuse. There is no foreign language in the way here, no obstacle course to be negotiated; Björling in Swedish becomes a natural actor in the scene. The sound of these live transcripts, his colleagues (including Kerstin Meyer) and the orchestra are of good quality.

Other posthumous opera releases have compensated for a much-discussed Björling lost opportunity and trailed a role that might have been. Illness and temperament respectively kept the tenor away from recording his *Ballo in maschera* Riccardo under Toscanini in 1954 and Solti in 1960. But Myto has taken up the Metropolitan Opera's admired 1940 broadcast of Björling with Zinka Milanov (a regular partner-to-be in his RCA operas), Alexander Svéd and Bruna Castagna, fierily conducted by Toscanini's one-time deputy, the composer-conductor Ettore Panizza. (The performance originally appeared on vinyl, in terrible sound, on the famous 'private' label run



Resplendent as Riccardo in *Un ballo in maschera* at the Met

by Ed Smith, an American friend of Björling's.) Atmospherically the distraught Boston governor (really, of course, a Swedish king) suits Björling down to the ground, the supposed coldness and distance working ideally for the character. This is one of the great Verdi opera sets.

The trailer comes from one of the two roles for which Björling fantasised about being ready in the 1950s: *Otello* (he made the Act 2 duet with Robert Merrill in a 1950s studio recital and was discussing a concert performance at the time of his death), and *Lohengrin*, for which Beecham considered him ideal. West Hill Radio Archives' new four-CD set of 'Broadcast Concerts 1937-1960' has versions of 'In fernem Land' in Swedish both with piano (Harry Ebert) and orchestra (Grevillius, inevitably, with the Gothenburg Orchestra just a month before the singer's death). As with Riccardo, there is something both natural and magical about the naivety and wonder with which Björling's narration of the Grail Knight's mission invests the role.

Among other rediscovered opera performances that deserve attention are two further, and older, *Trovatores* (from Covent Garden in 1939 on Legato Classics CDLCDI73 and from the Met in 1941 on Urania RM114913); the 1950 Met *Don Carlo* on Myto MCD00052 (another Verdi role that matched the tenor's temperament and timbre well, and was never made complete in a studio); and West Hill's recent 'Jussi Björling in Two Puccini Operas' (*La bobème* and *Manon Lescaut* from the Met in 1948 and 1956 – WHRA6020), in which his Rodolfo especially is more intimate and relaxed than on the famous Beecham set.

In real life, Björling in the 1950s was finding life in recital halls more congenial than in opera houses. It was (much) better paid. There was, frankly, less (if any) rehearsal. And there was no need to dress up – as in the photo with Caruso's widow, where he is wearing one of Enrico's old costumes, he often looked uncomfortable playing someone else. On RCA's 'Jussi Björling at Carnegie Hall – Rediscovered', Bluebell's 'Jussi at Gröna Lund – Complete Recordings 1950-60' and Testament's 2008 'Jussi Björling in Song', his concert singing has a directness of communication, an affecting simplicity alongside the eloquence of the voice, and a driving, natural instinct for the tempo of a live performance similar (if not actually superior) to his opera work.

At Gröna Lund, an amusement park in central Stockholm famous for its roller coasters and tunnel of love, Björling would entertain – and that is the word, as you can hear from his lively introductions and banter with those calling out from the audience – crowds of anything up to 15,000 with a well-sifted mixture of opera, operetta, lighter art and Swedish popular song. It's like the Three Tenors done by one tenor with about half the fuss and three times the impact – and there's no lack of amiable showing-off on top notes. Considering we're in the open air, the sound is tolerable plus.

Then Testament's 2008 collection 'In Song' –

chosen with a careful look at the current state of Björling's discography – restores the singer's first test recordings from 1929, his first recordings with Grevillius and an RCA LP of 1952 representing (mostly) the art-song part of Björling's then current recital programme. It also introduces dangerous accompanist Frederick Schauwecker, a player of opera at the keyboard.

To set Testament's 1952 songs against their live realisations on the 1957 Carnegie Hall recital is to hear how the tenor – like another rehearsal-hater, his older contemporary, conductor Hans Knappertsbusch – lived for the moment in the flesh rather than the ordered neatness of the studio. This is mostly not a new record. But the 10 numbers cut originally and restored in 2004 (a Scandinavian group including Grieg's 'A Swan' and some Swedish Sibelius, a wild 'Addio alla madre' from *Cavalleria rusticana*) give us back the blood-on-the-floor atmosphere of the original concert. Play loud – and do note Schauwecker's suitably 'drunken' accompaniment to the *Cav* excerpt. *Gramophone* reviewers have disagreed about this marathon programme of 12 songs, three arias and 10 encores. 'He is no Lieder singer, he has no trace of intimacy,' raged Andrew Porter back in 1958, uninterested in the live performance aspect of the release. John Steane bought into the project more in 2004. 'He sang "Adelaide" much better in 1939 on 78s, and his Schubert isn't the Schubert of (say) Peter Schreier (nor is Frederick Schauwecker's playing school-of-Gerald Moore). Still, even in these there is a surprising amount to be relished if the taste can be receptively adjusted. Above all, with announcements and applause, one feels oneself there, and, once there, then thrillingly in the presence of a singer whose art, as well as his voice, placed him among the century's finest.' 6



Björling at a Stockholm reception with the actress Elizabeth Taylor, right, and Marguerite, wife of the Swedish industrialist Axel Wenner-Gren

THE BEST OF JUSSI BJÖRLING

Unmissable recordings and collections showing off the inimitable tenor's art



Verdi - Un ballo in maschera
with Zinka Milanov, Stella Andreva,
Alexander Svéd; Metropolitan Opera
Chorus and Orch / Ettore Panizza

Myto © 2 MCD00008

New York, Saturday matinee broadcast,
December 1940



Verdi - Don Carlo
with Delia Rigal, Fedora Barbieri,
Robert Merrill; Metropolitan Opera
Chorus and Orch / Fritz Stiedry

West Hill Radio Archives © 3 WHRA6021

New York, Saturday matinee broadcasts,
November 1950 (one complete radio;
one excerpts from telecast)

Two key Verdi roles never recorded
in the studio.



'Broadcast Concerts 1937-1960'
with Licia Albanese, Anna-Lisa
Björling, Grace Moore, Bidú Sayão,
Eleanor Steber, Renata Tebaldi

West Hill Radio Archives © 4 WHRA6036

The short broadcasts in America and Sweden

that Björling enjoyed giving more and more as his career progressed.



'Jussi Björling at Carnegie Hall - Rediscovered'
with Frederick Schauwecker

RCA Red Seal © 82876 53379-2

Complete version of the controversial,
very 'live' March 1958 concert.



'Jussi at Gröna Lund - Complete Recordings 1950-60'
with various accompanists

Bluebell © 3 ABCD114

Despite the open-air scale, surprisingly
intimate music-making.



'Jussi Björling in Song'
with various accompanists

Testament © SBT1427

Cunning round-up of major
early recordings along with a forgotten
RCA studio recital with Schauwecker.

Tidings of joy

Another Christmas, another mostly impressive collection of albums of carols and seasonal songs. **Jeremy Nicholas** surveys the 2011 line-up



Ola Rudner: oratorio extracts and Bizet

Even hardened atheists have confessed a guilty fondness for Christmas carols.' So writes conductor Philip Barnes in the booklet for his Saint Louis disc. 'These songs speak of purity and innocence, of hope and even an implied redemption that appeals to the optimist within us all...And where carols are to be heard, choirs are to be found.'

Let's start in Germany with some of the earliest songs celebrating the birth of Christ. **Gregorianische Gesänge** (for disc details see the sidebar listing on page 41) features the choral school of the Benedictine Abbey of Münsterschwarzach in Bavaria, recorded in 1979. Twelve Gregorian Chants for Advent and 11 for Christmas are sung with impeccable diction and intonation in an acoustic halfway between empty cathedral and claustrophobic studio. Texts are in Latin, German and English.

We stay in Germany for a Festliche Weihnachtslieder entitled **Ich steh an deiner Krippe hier** ('I am standing here by your crib'). In fact, everything on this disc is in German (the lyrics of all the carols are printed in the booklet without translation or any information on the music). Avoiding the ubiquitous 'Stille nacht' and 'O Tannenbaum', the Würzburger Vocal-Solisten (an SATB + baritone chamber choir of nine voices) sing a selection of 28 songs, most from the early 17th to mid-19th centuries. The modest and little-known mingle with the familiar ('Es is ein Ros' entsprungen', 'Wie schön leucht' uns der Morgenstern'), with 'Engel auf den Feldern singen' ('Angels from the realms of glory') making an unexpected appearance in the choir's native language. Some are sung *a cappella*, others are discreetly accompanied by nine instrumentalists directed by Helmut Roth. If you like your carols soothing and unobtrusive, these polished

performances from 1984 make an attractive background listen.

'Angels from the realms' turns up again on Hänssler's **Der Musikalische Adventskalender 2011** as 'Hört der Engel helle Lieder'. Twenty-four songs for Advent and Christmas are sung and/or played by musicians and choirs from all over south-west Germany. 'The Little Drummer Boy' wittily quotes Ravel's *Boléro*, the lovely *Cantilene* for violin and piano by Joseph Rheinberger, John Rutter's 'Child in a Manger' (using 'Morning has broken') and the trio from Saint-Saëns's *Christmas Oratorio* are well worth hearing. The jazz-inflected versions of 'Wachet auf' (vocal duo/guitar/accordion) and Adam's 'O Holy Night' may appeal more to you than me, but variety and charm are the strengths of this superbly recorded and generally reflective collection – and one euro spent on every CD sold is donated to the children's aid campaign of SWR Television and Radio.

Bethlehem and Bizet

A second Hänssler disc, **Festliches Weihnachtskonzert**, features the Aurelius Sängerknaben Calw (Calw is a town in the northern Black Forest) in the company of the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen conducted by Ola Rudner. It opens with another beguiling piece by Rheinberger, 'Erwartung' ('Expectancy') from his oratorio *The Star of Bethlehem* before, yet again, 'Angels from the realms' ('Engel haben Himmelslieder') but sung with joyless solemnity. Two further rarities follow: *Christmas Overture on the Chorale 'Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her'* by Otto Nicolai, with a rousing choral finale, and a jolly but rather insipid 'Coro' from the Christmas oratorio *Die Freude der Hirten* (1777) by Bach's pupil Gottfried August Homilius (1714-85). The booklet provides no notes on the



St John's: the finest 'cathedral' disc of 2011

'These songs speak of purity and innocence, of hope and even an implied redemption that appeals to the optimist within us all'

music (though, somewhat whimsically, prints the whole of the nativity story from St Luke's Gospel). So, in case you're wondering what the *Prélude* from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* Suite No 1 is doing on a Christmas album, I can tell you that the opening tune, 'March of the Kings', is a medieval carol from Provence that Bizet borrowed for his incidental music to the play by Alphonse Daudet.

From Germany to Copenhagen for this year's most imaginative variation on the seasonal disc theme, **The Christmas Story**. Inspired by the Nine Lessons and Carols service, music director Paul Hillier presents the nativity story as told through plainchants, motets, 17th-century dialogues and traditional folk carols culled from Italian, German, Danish, English and American sources. His artists are Theatre of Voices (six voices underpinned by the mellifluous bass Jakob Bloch Jespersen) accompanied by theorbo, guitar or chamber organ in three dialogues by Tomasi, Grandi and Anerio; and the 16-voice *a cappella* ensemble Ars Nova Copenhagen who give light, airy and expertly balanced accounts of 20 items from plainchant to 'We wish you a merry Christmas'. The generous 66-page booklet is in English, French and German.

Sweet and faithful

It is to England we go for the finest 'cathedral' Christmas disc of the year. It comes from the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, under Andrew Nethsingha. Blessed with a particularly homogeneous and secure line-up of trebles when the disc was recorded last January, the choir offers a programme that mixes the new(-ish) and old, beginning with John Rutter's 'What sweeter music' and ending with 'O come, all ye faithful' in Sir David Willcocks's unbeatable arrangement.

Of the 24 items, only four last longer than four minutes, the choir illustrating their versatility with a sequence such as Harold Darke's setting of 'In the bleak mid-winter', Mack Wilberg's exuberant arrangement of 'Ding! dong! merrily on high', Elizabeth Poston's evergreen 'Jesus Christ the apple tree' and a version of 'I saw three ships' by Philip Marshall (1921-2005). The disc, **On Christmas Night**, also features the premiere recording of a carol by Michael Finnissy (b1946), 'Telling', which is bound to win many friends. John Challenger makes full use of the chapel organ and the excellent (English only) booklet has a delightfully composed photo (by Paul Marc Mitchell) of the choir off-duty. It says all you need to know about the joys of singing in a choir.

From the all-male St John's Choir to two all-male vocal ensembles. On **Joy to the World**, the King's Singers, recorded live at Cadogan Hall in December 2010, present a typically far-ranging, stylistically diverse and impeccably tuned programme of 18 carols frequently leaving one amazed at how six voices can achieve such rich sonority and long, fluid lines ('Gabriel's message', 'Stille nacht'). Highlights? Saint-Saëns's little-known part-song 'Sérénade d'hiver', a virtuoso rendition of 'Jingle Bells', and 'God rest you merry gentlemen' in an arrangement by Geoffrey Keating 'which owes rather a lot to Dave Brubeck's hit "Take Five"' (booklet). Keating is also responsible for the clever setting of 'The 12 Days of Christmas' using the celebrated series of thank-you letters by John Julius Norwich. The (spoken) delivery is a bit arch but it's a well-drilled routine which has the audience audibly in stitches.

No such light touch from the eight voices of Cantus, America's answer to the King's Singers. Their studio recording, **Christmas with Cantus**,



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PARSIFAL
DAS RHEINGOLD
DIE WALKÜRE
SIEGFRIED
GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG**

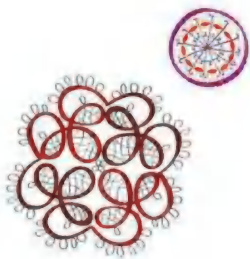
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The King's Singers:
an impeccably tuned
programme

consists of 16 carols and Christmas songs sung in Slovenian, French, Russian, Norwegian, Latin and English (texts provided), but while their sources are diverse, their seasonal celebration has too little variation in mood, tending towards the earnest, subdued and solemn. The exceptions are a fizzing arrangement by Peter J Wilhousky of 'Carol of the Bells' and another of 'Pat-a-drummer' (one of several songs with a discreet percussion part). Not quite as crisp and even as the King's Singers' disc, it's still handsomely presented and best for dipping into.

O little town of Americana

Still in America, I was much taken by the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus under their British-born music director Philip Barnes, and their **Christmas from Saint Louis** album. Barnes has led the choir since 1989 – and it shows. If not all his verse soloists have first-class voices, the confidence, verve and sensitivity with which this 50-strong *a cappella* chorus sing is impressive. The order of the 18 carols follows the nativity story beginning approximately with the first of Virgil Thomson's three striking, operatic *Scenes from the Holy Infancy*. Barnes's own carol 'The Lord at first did Adam make' is sure to be taken up by many choirs. The generous (79'35") programme, atmospherically recorded, will also remind UK readers that much as we may like to think that 'It came upon a midnight clear', 'Away in a manger', 'O little town of Bethlehem' and 'We three kings' are all traditional English carols, they are all entirely American in origin – and the Saint Louis Chorus sing the texts to their original tunes.

We end with brief mentions of two discs from the UK that could not be more different. **Sleep, Holy Babe** is a collection of 12 Christmas lullabies sung by Blossom Street, a mixed vocal ensemble of 20-somethings directed by Hilary Campbell. All but three of the works are by living composers, including Alexander Campkin (b1984), whose lovely carol provides the disc's title. There are eight world premiere recordings, one of which is 'A Lullaby' by Gerald Finzi.

Rejoice! Christmas at The Sage Gateshead was recorded live in December 2009 at the north of England's spectacular new (2004) concert venue. The Northern Sinfonia conducted by Simon Halsey is joined by a choir of 110 voices (all named in the booklet – bravo!) in a mix of old favourites ('Hark! the herald angels sing', 'Good King Wenceslas' et al), some modern (Goodall's 'The Lord is my shepherd') and some purely orchestral ('Sleigh Ride', 'Jingle Bells'), with a rousing version of Percy Fletcher's setting of Tennyson's 'Ring out, wild bells'. *The Times's* review of the concert praised the 'uniformity of tone, attack and spirit that was simply gorgeous to hear'. I'd go along with that. 🎵



STOCKING-FILLER CAROLS

The best of 2011's sacred songs and carols discs



Gregorianische Gesänge
Choral School of the Benedictine
Abbey of Münsterschwarzach
Christophorus 📀 CHE0166-2



Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier
Würzburger Vocal-Solisten /
Herbert Roth
Christophorus 📀 CHE0167-2



Der Musikalische Adventskalender
24 songs for Advent and Christmas
with south-west German choirs
Hänssler Classic 📀 CD93 279



Festliches Weihnachtskonzert
Aurelius Sängerknaben Calw /
Ola Rudner
Hänssler Classic 📀 CD98 635



The Christmas Story
Theatre of Voices; Ars Nova
Copenhagen / Paul Hillier
Harmonia Mundi 📀 HMU80 7556



On Christmas Night
Choir of St John's College,
Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha
Chandos 📀 CHSA5096



Joy to the World
The King's Singers
Signum 📀 SIGCD268



Christmas with Cantus
Cantus 📀 CTS1211



Christmas from Saint Louis
Saint Louis Chamber Chorus /
Philip Barnes
Regent 📀 REGCD373



Sleep, Holy Babe
Blossom Street / Hilary Campbell
Naxos 📀 8 572868



**Rejoice! Christmas at
The Sage Gateshead**
Northern Sinfonia / Simon Halsey
Avie 📀 AV2244

Critics' Choice 2011

It's been a year of excellent releases – but which recordings will our reviewers be giving friends and family as presents this Christmas?



Andrew Achenbach

Two fine Elgar offerings: Solti's 1975 LPO account of Symphony No 2 was a thrilling DVD discovery but it was the Goldners' perceptive way with the String Quartet that really stole my heart – such observant, poised and (above all) irresistibly communicative playing!

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67857 (10/11)



Nalen Anthoni

Something different – Haydn updated by Haydn for the new dawn in 1801. Radical indeed are his revisions to Op 20. Scholars scoff, but not the London Haydn Quartet, dauntlessly dedicated to the cause. 'Ring dem bells,' said Duke Ellington. So let's all join in!

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67877 (A/11)



Mike Ashman

Stokowski and Bernstein praised it as a 'work-in-progress'. Now The Beach Boys' 'The Smile Sessions' resurrects, after 44 years, Brian Wilson's Gershwin-influenced attempt at the definitive symphonic rock album. The out-takes (five CDs) outdo The Beatles' three 'Anthologies'.

EMI Ⓢ 027658-2



The London Haydn Quartet: dauntless and dedicated



Barshai, Rostropovich and Kogan as warm as they're dramatic



Peter Dickinson

Leon McCawley's reading of Barber's solo piano works is a superb collection, admirably and intelligently delivered. The piano output isn't extensive but it is attractive. Here we have all the mature pieces and some juvenilia in a fine recording on the enterprising Somm label. Somm © SOMMCD0108 (11/11)



Jed Distler

At last, a comprehensive and systematic presentation of Glenn Gould's television work (10 DVDs), painstakingly restored. Everything is interesting but four 1966 shows featuring Gould in conversation with Humphrey Burton, demonstrating from the keyboard (including his famous Strauss *Elektra* transcription) and a hair-raising Ravel *La valse* justify the price. Sony Classical © DVD 88697 95210-9



Philip Clark

When I give my mum a copy of Riccardo Chailly's new Beethoven symphony set, I'll sneak in Derek Bailey's 'Concert in Milwaukee'. She's an amateur guitarist and needs to hear how far a guitar can be pushed. Love improvised music, love your mum.

Incus © INCUS062



Adrian Edwards

This EMI release is a classy souvenir of the John Wilson Orchestra's sensational 2009 Proms debut: entertainment of the highest calibre, including an irresistible selection of songs and sequences from the great MGM musicals. The deluxe presentation, a single CD within an 83-page hardback book, complements the brilliant performances. EMI Classics © 028843-2 (11/11)



Rob Cowan

Beethoven's string trios vie with the Op 18 quartets as striking early expressions of his genius and these gripping live interpretations of three (including the expansive Op 3) by the Kogan-Barshai-Rostropovich Trio are off the leash - free, dramatic and warmly engaging. Supraphon © 2 SU4052-2 (8/11)

'Beethoven's string trios are striking early expressions of his genius and these gripping interpretations are off the leash'

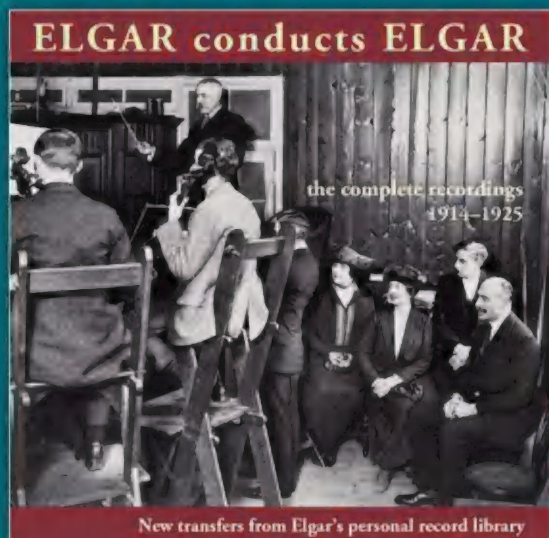
Rob Cowan



Jeremy Dibble

If you want to experience the range of Vaughan Williams's different styles and voices - the pathos of the *Tallis Fantasia*, the warmth and lyricism of his *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, the bizarre burlesque of *The Poisoned Kiss* or the neo-classicism of the *Concerto accademico* - then this radiant recording of his Suite for Viola and Orchestra will generously suffice. This disc, from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, is a must for all lovers of British music. Hyperion © CDA67839 (12/11)

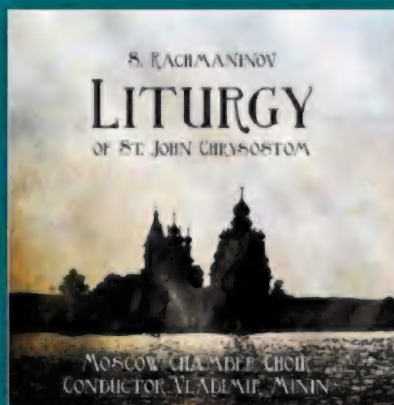
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The complete recordings 1914-1925 in new digital transfers from Elgar's own record library.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



RACHMANINOV
Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
MELCD 1001950

First performed in 1910, this performance was recorded in Smolensk Cathedral and showcases the talents of the legendary Russian basses from the Moscow Chamber Choir.

BOX SETS FOR CHRISTMAS



TCHAIKOVSKY BALLETS:
Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty,
The Nutcracker
MELCD 1001951

8 CD
SPECIAL
PRICE

A stunning 8 CD set performed by the USSR State Academic Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Svetlanov.



THE INTERNATIONAL
TCHAIKOVSKY
COMPETITION
MELCD 1001860

5 CD
SPECIAL
PRICE

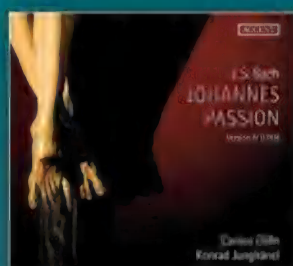
For the first time ever, Melodiya has released a 5 CD set of the gold winners in each of the four disciplines. Artists include Van Cliburn, Valery Klimov, Natalia Shakhovskaya and Jane Marsh.

NEW RELEASE



SCHÜTZ MUSIKALISCHE EXEQUIEN
CARUS 83738

Continuing Carus' critically acclaimed series of the complete works of Heinrich Schütz, Volume 3 presents Musikalische Exequien (with some premiere recordings), and is performed by Dorothee Mields, Harry van der Kamp, directed by Rademann.



JS BACH
Johannes Passion
KCC 24251

In this recording of the rarely performed fourth version of the St. John Passion, Cantus Cölln performs the entire work as a double vocal quartet.



MENDELSSOHN
Early Songs
AVI 8553222

Some of these songs were only recently discovered and are therefore a welcome addition to the catalogue. Performed here brilliantly by Ruth Ziesak, Carsten Süss and accompanied by Gerold Huber.



TEARS OF JOY
English Lute Songs and Early Music
KTC 4038 - 2CD

Includes songs by Locke, Morley, Campion, Lawes and Ravenscroft and packaged with a bonus 15th anniversary Zefiro Torna CD.



HOWARD SHORE
The Lord of the Rings Symphony
HWR 1005

A six movement symphony created from the music of the film, each movement reflecting each of the six books. An incredible performance.

CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED

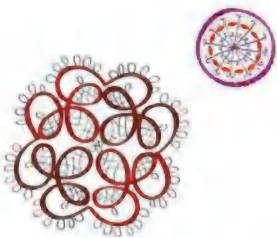


EDUARDO FERNANDEZ PLAYS GIULIANI
OC 401

Mauro Giuliani was one of the greatest guitar virtuosos of the 19th Century. More than 200 works for guitar have been handed down and are played here by internationally acclaimed guitarist, Eduardo Fernandez.



GRAMOPHONE CHOICE



'An enterprising recording from the Binchois Consort celebrates England's most influential musicians before The Beatles'

Fabrice Fitch



Richard Fairman

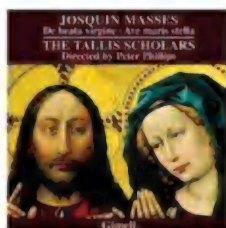
Death in Venice filmed in Venice itself was always going to have a special cachet. Ravishingly designed by Pier Luigi Pizzi in the finest Italian style, the opera has rarely looked so beautiful and, although the cast has no big names, everybody performs to a high level.

Dynamic Ⓢ DVD 33608 (2/11)

David Fallows

Once again, it has to be the Tallis Scholars and Peter Phillips with flawless and marvellously transparent singing in two amazing Josquin Masses – *Missa de Beata Virgine* and *Missa Ave maris stella* – and a Credo that may be by him.

Gimell Ⓢ CDGIM044 (12/11)



David Fanning

Weinberg's compelling commemoration of Auschwitz, *The Passenger*, is one of the few of its kind that escapes all charges of opportunism. The DVD of David Pountney's superb July 2010 premiere production in Bregenz captures a performance superior to the one more recently heard in London. It makes a bold case for the piece being the operatic discovery of the 21st century.

Neos Ⓢ DVD NEOS51006

Fabrice Fitch

A characteristically enterprising recording from the Binchois Consort, 'Music for Henry V and the House of Lancaster', celebrates the most influential generation of English musicians before The Beatles. The list of composers includes Henry V, the victor at Agincourt. It's a festive, celebratory disc in many ways, and a great introduction to music that deserves to be celebrated.

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67868 (A/11)



Death in Venice: the opera has rarely looked so beautiful

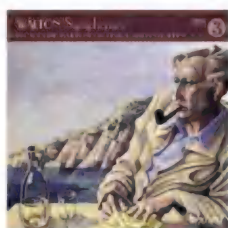
PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHELE CROSERIA

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Conductors, violinists and pianists enjoy a long shelf-life at the top, but not so often wind players. Fifty years on, oboist Heinz Holliger still plays Bach with the same panache and probing insight that he did in the early Philips days – but with a ravishing autumnal poignancy in the slow movements. Wise and wonderful musicianship.

ECM New Series Ⓢ 476 4386 (A/11)





Edward Greenfield

Walton's First Symphony has long been established as one of the iconic masterpieces of the 1930s, reflecting the darkly intense mood of the time. His Second Symphony of 1956-60 makes the perfect coupling and Martyn Brabbins, excelling himself, directs a reading that far more than usual conveys comparable electricity, helped by superb playing from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and a vivid recording quality. To complete the picture, this account of the First even rivals the classic Previn version of the 1960s.

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67794 (10/11)



David Gutman

From my own reviewing pile, Claudio Abbado's Mahler Ninth from Lucerne (DVD only) is self-recommending (6/11). But casting around elsewhere I admired Christian Tetzlaff's eponymous quartet in a rigorous account of Sibelius's *Voces intimae* (2/11) but must ultimately go for the Korngold quartets championed by the Doric String Quartet. You don't need a sweet tooth to appreciate invention of this quality and those who have so far missed out on a terrific disc should start dropping hints.

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10611 (11/10)



Lindsay Kemp

The pleasures I took from dipping in and out of Steven Osborne's complete Ravel solo piano works set last summer were such that I would gladly pass them on to a friend. The music is as ravishing as ever, but what intelligence, clarity and deftly lit atmosphere there is in the playing of it! Only two discs, but enough to enjoy all the year.

Hyperion Ⓢ ② CDA67731/2 (4/11)



Martyn Brabbins:
excelling himself
in Walton

'Brabbins and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's account of Walton's First Symphony even rivals the classic Previn version'

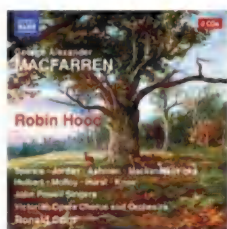
Edward Greenfield



Tess Knighton

My Christmas gift for this year will be I Fagiolini's marvellous recording of Alessandro Striggio's Mass in 40 Parts. Although the work has been known about since the 16th century, the music was believed lost until its recent rediscovery by Davitt Moroney. Now it can be heard in all its glory – and glorious it is indeed. Robert Hollingworth's line-up of voices and instruments (including Renaissance strings, cornetts, sackbuts, shawms and recorders, as well as plucked strings and organ) is excellent and creates a sound world of magnificence that reflects the Renaissance courts for which it, and its 40-voice motet, were composed.

Decca Ⓢ ② (CD + DVD) 478 2734DH (5/11)



Andrew Lamb

Thanks to the remarkable enterprise of Victorian Opera, here's another invaluable and hugely enjoyable offering in the neglected field of Victorian Romantic opera, Macfarren's *Robin Hood* – a work easy on the ear and breathing fresh British air, with Nicky Spence leading full-scale forces under Ronald Corp.

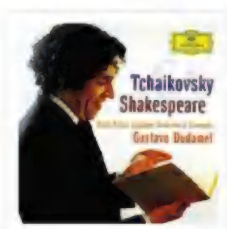
Naxos ③ ② 8660306/7



Richard Lawrence

Same orchestra and record company; but this, rather than the vapid tinklings of CPE Bach's harpsichord concertos, should have won the Baroque Instrumental category at this year's Gramophone Awards. Marvel at Telemann's inexhaustible invention in these beautifully played suites, concertos and sonatas.

Harmonia Mundi ④ HMC90 2042/5 (1/11)



Ivan March

Gustavo Dudamel was Gramophone's 2011 Artist of the Year, and for me his magnificently played Tchaikovsky collection on DG is unmissable, one of the most memorable Tchaikovsky CDs ever. His account of *Hamlet* – sonorous, thrilling and darkly atmospheric – is even finer than Stokowski's famous version. *The Tempest* is made to seem a masterpiece, and *Romeo and Juliet* is poignantly fresh-minted.

DG ⑥ 477 9355GH (6/11)



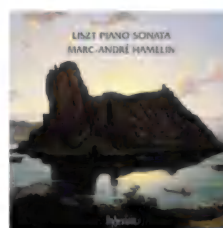
Ivan Moody

Easter for Christmas this year: MacMillan's *Visitatio Sepulchri* – shortlisted in this year's Awards – is one of his most assured and joyous yet searching sacred works yet. *Sun-Dogs*, a challenging *a cappella* setting of poems by Michael Symmons-Roberts, is a perfect complement. Conducted by Celso Antunes and the composer. Outstanding.

BIS ⑦ ⑧ BIS-SACD1719 (8/10)



Marc-André Hamelin: making you wonder anew at Liszt's genius



Bryce Morrison

Drowned in a deluge of recordings celebrating the Liszt anniversary, I can only marvel at Marc-André Hamelin's recital – a towering tribute if ever there was one. From him the Sonata emerges as an astonishing landmark in the history of music, and elsewhere he makes you wonder anew at the dazzle, scope and prophecy of Liszt's genius.

Hyperion ⑥ CDA67760 (5/11)



Gustavo Dudamel: Gramophone's 2011 Artist of the Year

'Drowned in a deluge of Liszt recordings, I can only marvel at Hamelin's recital – a towering tribute if ever there was one'

Bryce Morrison



Jeremy Nicholas

My favourite discovery of the year is the song 'Ombra di nube' recorded in 1935 by the great Claudia Muzio, but no release in the past 12 months has given me more pleasure than APR's immaculately presented and annotated collection of 87 titles in superb transfers. A feast of stunning pianism by Eileen Joyce.

APR ③ ⑤ APR7502 (12/11)



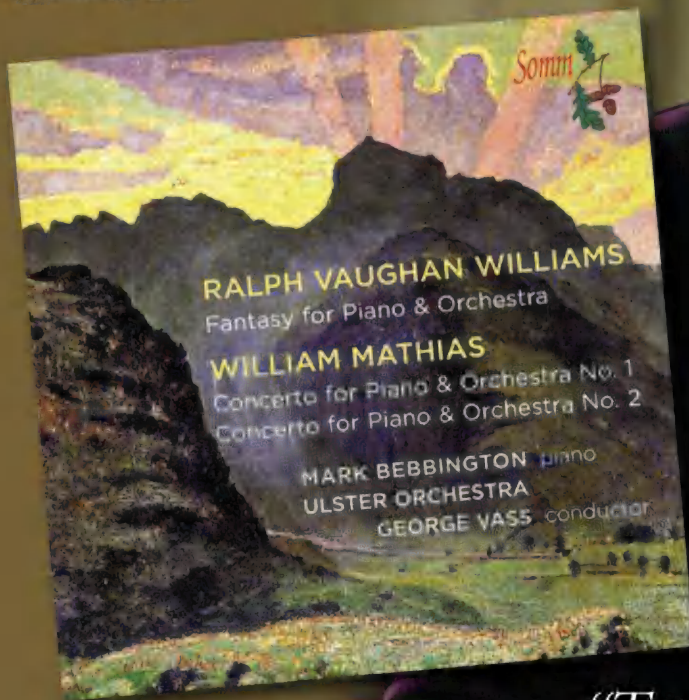
EXCITING NEW RELEASE

THREE WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS from SOMM

The newly discovered RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Fantasia for Piano & Orchestra

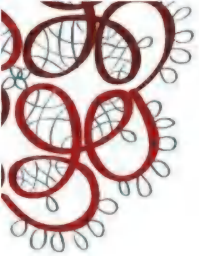
WILLIAM MATHIAS
Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2

MARK BEBBINGTON Piano
ULSTER ORCHESTRA
GEORGE VASS Conductor
SOMMCD 246

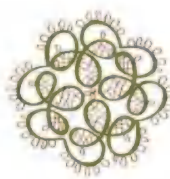


"Truly a remarkable pianist"

The Times



WorldMags.net



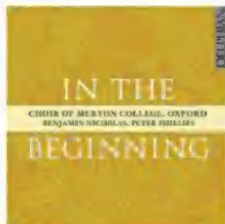
CRITICS' CHOICE 2011



Christopher Nickol

What better Christmas present than to listen to an outstanding new choir performing new compositions alongside masterpieces from the 16th, 17th and 20th centuries? The combination of wonderful words and music with the glorious singing of the Merton College Choir, formed in 2008, is truly an emotional experience.

Delphian © DCD34072 (12/11)



Peter Quantrill

A London performance of the *Haffner* Symphony was the high point of my musical year. Abbado and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra rejoiced in grandeur and confidence while retaining the humility to smile as they rediscovered the music. His new Mozart release - with many of the same players - also operates on an exalted level of love that transcends mere style.

Archiv © 477 9792AH



Geoffrey Norris

James Ehnes, the BBC Philharmonic and Gianandrea Noseda are superb in these three concertos, identifying three periods in Bartók's life and finding just the right tone for each. Passion, tang, bravura and the most beguiling shades of lyricism combine to make all these performances utterly compelling.

Chandos © CHAN10690 (11/11)

'Passion, tang, bravura and a beguiling lyricism make all these performances utterly compelling'

Geoffrey Norris

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet:
finest Haydn pianism
since Alfred Brendel



PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL MITCHELL



Guy Rickards

While Chandos's *Glière* box proved a compelling memorial to Ted Downes, Martyn Brabbins's riveting accounts of Brian's talismanic 10th and profound 30th symphonies have proved more enduring still. They're coupled with the *Third English Suite* (contemporary with the *Gothic* that Brabbins conquered in July and released on Hyperion) and the *Orchestral Concerto*.

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7267 (8/11)



Malcolm Riley

The Armonico Consort's second anthology displays once again a demonstration-quality recording in a wide-ranging programme of choral delights. From the reworking of Tallis's timeless *Third Mode Melody* to Tavener's sublime *Funeral Ikos*, there is so much to relish here. Repeated hearings leave me refreshed and braced for the day ahead.

Signum © SIGCD235 (5/11)



Stephen Plaistow

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet says he is on a crusade to convey 'the boundless treasures of this sublime music'. I have not heard finer Haydn-playing from a pianist since Alfred Brendel, and among the four sonatas here, the one in C minor, the first great sonata for the piano, has blown me away.

Chandos © CHAN10689 (12/11)



Marc Rochester

The playing is delightful in its openness and sincerity and in its clear affection for Saint-Saëns's music. What's more, the recording is absolutely honest, too, even down to the obtrusive organ action clatter.

Priory © ② PRCD1049 (12/11)



Julie Anne Sadie

The Christmas gift I'd select from the CDs I've listened to this year has to be Julia Wedman's radiant recording of Biber's *Mystery Sonatas*. Nos 1-3 relate the story of the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity, but it is No 12, 'The Guardian Angel', we all need most at this time.

Sono Luminus ⑤ ② DSL92127 (7/11)



David Patrick Stearns

A performance from the one-off Saturday afternoon concert opera series by the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. Although most of them are special occasions, even for this great music capital, the Jaap van Zweden-conducted *Parsifal* was exceptionally distinguished, owing partly to the rock-solid casting and Zweden's high-concentration approach to the score. But what makes this recording significant, even amid this opera's extensive discography, is Klaus Florian Vogt in the title-role. No *Parsifal* has sounded so convincingly boyish. Vogt has a lightish English tenor sound that does the work of a Heldenbaritone. He's also exceptionally alert to the dramatic content. I never even imagined a *Parsifal* like this – much less heard one.

Challenge Classics ⑤ ④ CC72519 (12/11)

'What makes this recording significant is the boyish-sounding Vogt in the title-role. I never even imagined a Parsifal like this – much less heard one'

David Patrick Stearns



Edward Seckerson

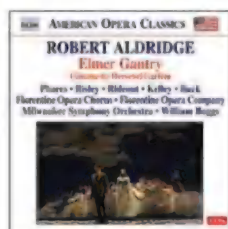
Here we have, quite simply, the most insightful, illuminating and uplifting performance that Mahler's *Resurrection* has enjoyed in a generation. As I wrote in these pages: 'You may think you know how Mahler's Second Symphony goes. Think again.'

LPO ⑤ ② LP00054 (8/11)

Pwyll ap Siôn

Finally a 9/11 work that manages to communicate the complex and often contradictory range of emotions, thoughts and feelings caused by that momentous event. Composed for pre-recorded voices and string quartet, and played with power and precision by the Kronos Quartet, Steve Reich has written a truly profound work.

Nonesuch ⑤ ② (CD + DVD) 7559 79645-7 (11/11)



Ken Smith

I'd give my opera-loving friends this prime contender for the mantle of All-American Opera, where a virile baritone, a mercurial mezzo and a fiery and somewhat strident tenor meet various choruses of school fight songs and syncopated gospel hymns. For once, an all-American story rendered operatically in purely American terms.

Naxos ⑤ ② 8 669032/3



Jaap van Zweden: a high-concentration approach to the score

PHOTOGRAPHY: BERT HULSELMANS, ERIC RICHMOND/CB ARTISTS



David Threasher

Having been beastly about Ilya Gringolts in the Schumann piano trios (7/11), I'm pleased that his recording of the string quartets is so fine. However, this year I was even more taken by Beethoven's piano concertos as recorded by Howard Shelley – a true musician's musician, of whom I've long been a great admirer.

Chandos ④ CHAN10695

David Vickers

The long overdue return of the Taverner Consort & Players and Andrew Parrott made me jump for joy like the proverbial child on Christmas morning. Their reconstruction of Bach's funeral music for his Cöthen patron places the Taverners firmly back where they belong, at the vanguard of stimulating research-driven concepts interpreted with enthralling musicality.

Avie ④ AV2241 (12/11)



John Warrack

Perhaps one as a post-Christmas bracer: two performances of exceptional lucidity and intelligence, of two works celebrating those qualities, from the set that Mozart wrote under Haydn's inspiration and sent the old master as a present, hoping they were good enough.

Virgin Classics ④ 070922-2 (11/11)

'A post-Christmas bracer: two performances of exceptional lucidity and intelligence, of two works celebrating those qualities'

John Warrack



Richard Whitehouse

Hyperion has issued the first complete recording of Frank Martin's *Der Sturm*, with Robert Holl's authoritative Prospero, Christine Buffle's wide-eyed Miranda and Thierry Fischer securing a committed response from the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic. A near-definitive account of an opera whose take on *The Tempest* is unequalled for sensitivity and insight.

Hyperion ③ CDA67821/3 (8/11)

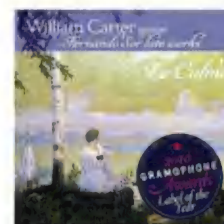
Howard Shelley:
a true musician's
musician



Arnold Whittall

The pioneering imaginativeness of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern stands out in performances of authority and richness very much of our own time. With Quatuor Diotima, Sandrine Piau and Marie-Nicole Lemieux, their string quartets with sung movements have never sounded more compelling.

Naïve ④ V5240 (8/11)



William Yeoman

One of Fernando Sor's greatest gifts was the ability to capture the essence of Viennese Classicism in miniatures of extraordinary beauty. One of guitarist William Carter's greatest gifts is the ability to release again the full fragrance of Sor's musical milieu in similarly beautiful performances. I cannot imagine a greater musical gift this Christmas.

Linn ④ CKD380 (10/11)

hyperion

Worldwide

available 28 NOVEMBER 2011

*This phenomenal recording of HAVERGAL BRIAN's **GOTHIC SYMPHONY** was captured on 17 July 2011 at London's Royal Albert Hall in front of a sell-out audience. Brian's Symphony No 1 in D minor calls for over 800 performers: just about every known orchestral instrument, a double chorus of over 500, plus children's choirs. The symphony ends with an hour-long Te Deum—the church's blazing Hymn of Thanksgiving.*

Whether or not you were lucky enough to be there on the night, this is a recording not to be missed.

soprano SUSAN GRITTON · mezzo-soprano CHRISTINE RICE
tenor PETER AUTY · bass ALASTAIR MILES
organ DAVID GOODE

THE BACH CHOIR · BBC NATIONAL CHORUS OF WALES
BRIGHTON FESTIVAL CHORUS · CBSO YOUTH CHORUS · CÔR CAERDYDD
ELTHAM COLLEGE BOYS' CHOIR · HUDDERSFIELD CHORAL SOCIETY
LONDON SYMPHONY CHORUS · SOUTHEAST BOYS' AND GIRLS' CHOIRS
BBC NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF WALES · BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA
conductor MARTYN BRABBINS



CDA67971/2
(2 compact discs)

BBC
Proms

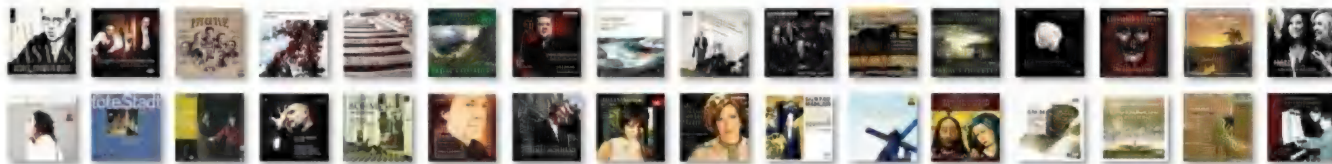


BBC
Proms

MP3 and lossless downloads of all our recordings are
available from www.hyperion-records.co.uk

GRAMOPHONE *Reviews*

December 2011



GRAMOPHONE *Reviewers*



Rob Cowan
Contributing
Editor

Listening, for me, has many key functions. My day job as co-presenter of BBC Radio 3's *Essential Classics* (with Sarah Walker) and *Sunday Morning* (with our very own James Jolly) necessitates a great deal of planning and supplements my function on *Gramophone* both as a reviewer and Contributing Editor – someone who can keep an alert ear open to what's out there and take a lively interest in our team's opinions.

For example, at the time of writing this, I can't be quite sure what to expect from our piano aficionados on the young Maurizio Pollini's first, previously unissued, set of Chopin Etudes (look out for a review in the

January issue), but what's for sure is that the story behind its long-term embargo and eventual release is headline news in itself. Speaking personally, I'm bowled over and intend to give at least a couple of the studies a radio airing. That's the thrill of the job. I hear something exciting, earmark it for broadcast and tuck it into my CD-filled rucksack.

Equally important is the element of discovery or rediscovery. Martin Haselböck has been doing the latter with his CDs of Liszt orchestral works. The effect is like turning the music inside out so that previously dulled textures suddenly absorb added light and you're encouraged to listen afresh.

Andrew Achenbach	Ivan March
Nalen Anthoni	Ivan Moody
Mike Ashman	Bryce Morrison
Philip Clark	Jeremy Nicholas
Rob Cowan*	Christopher Nickol
Justin Davidson	Geoffrey Norris
Jeremy Dibble	Richard Osborne
Peter Dickinson	Stephen Plaistow
Jed Distler	Peter Quantrill
Duncan Druce	Guy Rickards
Adrian Edwards	Malcolm Riley
Richard Fairman	Marc Rochester
David Fallows	Julie Anne Sadie
David Fanning	Edward Seckerson
Iain Fenlon	Pwyll ap Siôn
Fabrice Fitch	Harriet Smith
Jonathan	Ken Smith
Freeman-Attwood	David Patrick Stearns
Edward Greenfield	David Threasher
David Gutman	David Vickers
Lindsay Kemp	John Warrack
Philip Kennicott	Richard Whitehouse
Tess Knighton	Arnold Whittall
Andrew Lamb	Richard Wigmore
Richard Lawrence	William Yeoman

* Contributing Editor

THE SYMBOLS TO LOOK FOR...



Gramophone Choice

Our pick of the best 12 recordings reviewed in each issue. Every month the discs earning the most glowing endorsements from *Gramophone's* reviewers are put forward, the editorial team selecting the top dozen must-hear products, which include reissue and DVD choices.



Critic's Choice

An independent accolade from a particular reviewer who believes a recording they have listened to is exceptional enough to be singled out for especially high praise.






Critic's Choice, though, is superseded by *Gramophone* Choice (where a critic's admiration is taken as read).



Gramophone Player

Whenever this symbol appears, you can visit the *Gramophone* Player online to sample music from the recording in a high-quality audio stream. Listening to the music is free and if you like what you hear you can follow convenient links to retail outlets. Visit gramophone.co.uk

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- R** Reissue
- H** Historic
- 2** Multiple-disc set (number of discs in set)
- T** Text(s) included
- t** translation(s) included
- S** Synopsis included
- s** subtitles included
-  SACD
-  DVD audio
-  DVD video
-  Blu-ray
-  Download only
- nla** no longer available
- aas** all available separately
- oas** only available separately
- £** £11 and over
- £8** £8 to £10.99
- £6** £6 to £7.99
- £5** £5.99 and below



Recording of the Month

'They play up Schumann's unique combination of whimsy and fervour ... These are performances that make you fall in love with the music all over again'

Coming out of the woods

Harriet Smith welcomes a recording that champions Schumann's string quartets

Schumann

Three String Quartets, Op 41

Doric Quartet

Chandos © CHAN10692 (74' • DDD)

Of all the indisputably great composers, Schumann has had to contend with more brickbats than most. Now we've finally scotched once and for all the notion that he couldn't orchestrate very effectively, there's still much to be done in terms of the reputation of his choral music and – even today – some of his chamber music. Yet Op 41 is one of the most remarkable opus numbers in all chamber music, up there, I'd suggest, with Beethoven's Opp 18 and 59 in cumulative impact. It's all the more remarkable, then, that these were Schumann's only published string quartets, sketched at his usual white-hot pace during June and July of 1842, that extraordinary year in which he followed illness with a flowering of chamber works that also includes both the Piano Quartet and Piano Quintet. But the idea of composing string quartets had been in his mind for some time: he first heard Beethoven's Opp 131 and 127 Quartets in 1837, confiding, 'I can find no words to describe [their] greatness...they seem to me...to mark the furthest limits yet attained

by human art and imagination'. Rather than being daunted by their achievement, he seems to have been geared up by them and immediately proposed writing his own set of three.

The Zehetmair Quartet set the bar very high with their astoundingly fresh, supple readings of Nos 1 and 3, and it was no surprise when they scooped Record of the Year in the 2003 *Gramophone* Awards. But here, at last, is a seriously recommendable version of all three. And what a triumvirate these are: a *Gramophone* reviewer from a somewhat earlier age found fault with both No 1 and No 3, complaining that the slow movement of the First sounded like an arrangement of a piano piece (a rather bizarre comment, given how well its sustained textures work on string instruments), while the finale of the Third was 'based on one of the most irritating tunes I know'.

One man's irritating is, clearly, another [wo]man's catchy, especially when played with such energy as it is by the Doric Quartet, matching the Takács for high-octane playing while adding an extra degree of rusticity, which isn't inappropriate. The Zehetmair tend to play up the extremes in the music still more, notably in the febrile second

and fourth movements of No 1, with their exquisite gradations of dynamic and timbre. But the Doric are equally colourful and give them a real run for their money. Their very opening to this quartet is beautifully managed – sustained, with a clarity of counterpoint pointing up the individuality of the four players as well as their collective finesse – before giving way to the lolling *Allegro* that, as so often with this composer, attempts a carefree demeanour but doesn't quite manage it. That ambiguity of mood is superbly conveyed by the Doric. And if their *Scherzo* is slightly less frenetic than the Zehetmair's (who never let us forget that these quartets were dedicated to Mendelssohn), it's very much in keeping with their vision of the music, with this movement packing a punch out of all proportion to its duration.

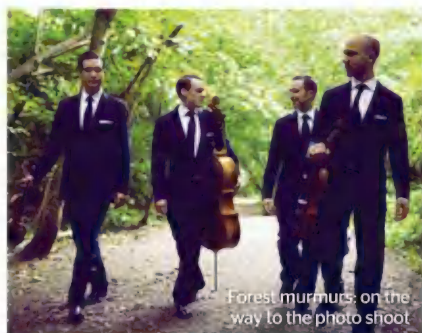
The Doric are not afraid of using *portamento* either, applied with particular elegance to the entwining melody that opens the third movement, which is here encased in warmly voluptuous sound. But beauty is never at the cost of musical direction and a sense of the pacing of the quartet as a whole.

It's in No 2 that I find the Doric particularly compelling. The opening



The Doric Quartet: give the Zehetmairs a run for their money

PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORGE GARNIER/CHANDOS



Forest murmurs: on the way to the photo shoot

movement again has the warmth that they brought to the *Adagio* of No 1, while they superbly manage the rhythmic instability of the third movement, capturing its darting, febrile quality with precision and grace. Throughout, they relish the work's Beethovenian shifts of mood, playing up Schumann's unique combination of whimsy and fervour. And their ending of the quartet is a superbly adrenalin-pumped affair. These are performances that make you fall in love with the music all over again.

One of the most striking aspects of the Third Quartet is the way Schumann takes the lower instruments (the cello

in particular) right out of their comfort zones, such as in the *Allegro molto moderato* of the opening movement. It is done to particularly poignant effect here in a movement that is as unstable as those Beethoven quartets that Schumann so admired. The shifts in mood are a real challenge, here superbly caught, such as the hymnic third movement which yields to more agitated writing, a gear-change that you simply don't notice here, so naturally is it done. In the Doric's collective hands, the finale skirts close to mania at times, not quite so close as the Zehetmair, perhaps, but still dangerously close.

The recording is immediate and present; there's the occasional audible intake of breath but not enough to distract. And Nicholas Marston's notes combine scholarship with readability and are particularly enlightening on the subject of Schumann and Beethoven. Only one question: what prompted the players to take their instruments for a walk in the woods for their photo shoot? **G**

Qts Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:

Zehetmair Qt (6/03) (ECM) 472 169-2

Qt No 3 – selected comparison:

Takács Qt (11/09) (HYPE) CDA67631

Listening points

Your guide to the disc's memorable moments

Track 1, opening

At the start of the First Quartet's first movement, you can hear Bach as well as Beethoven resonating through the writing in the austere but beautiful counterpoint of the Doric's performance.

Track 3, opening

At the start of the First Quartet's third movement, entwining lines, introduced by the cello, lead to slow-moving chordal writing that the Doric spice up with deliciously judged *portamentos*.

Track 7, opening

Schumann teases the listener in the silvery *Scherzo* of his Second Quartet, which abounds in cross-rhythms that conceal the bar-lines – all to gleeful effect in the Doric's hands.

Track 8, 3'45"

In the hectic coda – the Second Quartet's last word – Schumann's themes shoot by at considerable speed; it ends with an irrepressible upwards surge, done with great aplomb by the Doric.

Track 9, 1'17"

Changeability superbly caught in the first movement of the Third Quartet. From the peremptory chords to the melting melody, cellist John Myerscough is not afraid of heights, and is sonorously answered by leader Alex Redington.

Track 12, 4'54"

Unsettled up until the final moments, the obsessively repeated rhythm in the Finale of the Third Quartet sounds driven but never heavy in this performance.



Visit the Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk to hear an excerpt from this issue's Recording of the Month



Peter Quantrill reviews Mendelssohn from Freiburg

'Von der Goltz and the band point the phrase as a deft and dangerous gesture from the unstoppable teenage Felix' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



David Gutman reviews live Shostakovich from Svetlanov

'It has been suggested that he gave the performance of his life. I am not so sure'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**

JS Bach

Keyboard Concertos - BWV1052; BWV1054; BWV1056; BWV1058; BWV974 (after Marcello: Oboe Concerto) - Adagio (arr Tharaud/Labadie). Concerto for Four Keyboards and Orchestra, BWV1065 (after Vivaldi: Concerto Op 3 No 10)

Alexandre Tharaud *pf*

Les Violons du Roy / Bernard Labadie

Virgin Classics © 070913-2 (75' • DDD)



Tharaud's concertos with a multitracked quadruple

What comes across irresistibly in this new recording is the physical pleasure of playing Bach on a piano. Rhythms are lightly sprung, energy is propulsive, accents are unapologetic and the music dances. Tharaud is often faster than Hewitt in her superb readings with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, notably in the D minor Concerto, where his opening chords launch a movement of great vivacity. At times he can even make Gould sound a touch stolid (though that's exacerbated by the Columbia SO, which sounds positively portly alongside the leaner, meaner chamber orchestras favoured today). Tharaud shares the studio with Bernard Labadie's Violons du Roy, which use modern strings but Baroque bowing techniques, and keep vibrato for expressive effect. That it doesn't sound at odds with the piano continuo in the *tuttis* says much for their shared vision and Tharaud's lithe touch, never over-weighting the texture, something which Perahia also judges to a nicety. Hewitt solves the problem in a different way - with a harpsichord, which adds a pleasing extra dimension to the colour. My only doubts arose in the Concerto for four keyboards, for which Tharaud has multitracked the solo parts. It sounds more reined in than the other works here, ironically perhaps as a result of the recording technique.

That he can spin a line is amply demonstrated in the arrangement of the Marcello *Adagio*, originally for oboe, which reminds us that Baroque composers were on to the potency of repetition long before minimalists got in on the act. But when it comes to slow movements, no one can quite rival Perahia for poetry, especially in the

quietly solemn centre of the G minor Concerto, though here Tharaud's semi-period players help create a tension between new and old that is highly effective. Overall, then, a disc that deserves to be up there with Perahia and Hewitt.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons:

Perahia, ASMF (5/01st, 6/02nd) (SONY) 88697 74291-2

Hewitt, ACO, Tognetti (9/05th) (HYPE) CDA67607/8

Gould, Columbia SO, Golschmann (SONY) 82876 87367-2

Bartók • Tchaikovsky

Bartók Violin Concerto No 2

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto

Valeriy Sokolov *vn*

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / David Zinman

Virgin Classics © 642017-0 (74' • DDD)



Former 'one-to-watch' fiddler in formidable masterworks

Valeriy Sokolov has the measure of both of these concertos and sounds entirely comfortable coping with their different technical demands. In the Tchaikovsky, I like the way he doesn't always follow the herd, avoiding many traditional broadenings of the tempo, for example. With his comparatively light tone, he's especially good at portraying the first movement's elegant, balletic side. His account of the *Andante* is suave and expressive (though maybe a little too cool in places) and if he seems to hold back at the start of the finale, that only serves to bring the dashing virtuosity of the coda into relief. Zinman and his orchestra provide exceptionally finely balanced, well-paced support.

In the Bartók, Sokolov is particularly convincing in the passionate music of the outer movements, attacking it with verve, rhythmic precision and fine, vibrant tone. Though he observes all the contrasts indicated in the score, he rarely surprises or amazes us with changes of tonal quality; in the central variation movement he misses several opportunities of this kind. However, with an alert, spirited and clearly balanced orchestra, these performances are certainly recommendable.

I should point out, though, that in recent years there have been some exceptional recordings of both the Tchaikovsky and the Bartók. In the Bartók, Gil Shaham and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Boulez produce playing of remarkable finesse and imaginative range, in an especially well-defined recording, highlighting the impressionistic beauty of the orchestral writing. And Julia Fischer's Tchaikovsky has a thrilling intensity, perfectly complemented by the authentic timbre of the Russian National Orchestra.

Duncan Druce

Bartók - selected comparison:

Shaham, Chicago SO, Boulez (6/99) (DG) 459 639-2GH

Tchaikovsky - selected comparison:

J Fischer, Russian Nat Orch, Kreizberg

(4/07) (PENT) PTC5186 095

Berlioz • Paganini

Berlioz Harold en Italie, Op 16th. Béatrice et Bénédict - Overture Paganini Viola Concerto^o

^oDavid Aaron Carpenter *va* Helsinki Philharmonic

Orchestra / Vladimir Ashkenazy

Ondine © ODE1188-2 (65' • DDD)



Paganini's concerto and a work he helped spawn

It's an excellent idea to programme *Harold in Italy* - a work composed at the suggestion of Paganini but spurned by the great virtuoso because the solo part contained too many rests - together with the piece he himself composed for his Stradivari viola. Paganini writes for the viola as he does for the violin, using an unusually extended range and many brilliant effects. David Aaron Carpenter rises to all the challenges with great dexterity, preserving fine tone and pure intonation in the most (for the viola player) alarming situations. Paganini's reputation, however, was based on something beyond his technical brilliance and I'm not persuaded that Carpenter makes the most of the more soulful passages.

The disc starts with a neat, lively, well-paced account of the *Béatrice et Bénédict* Overture and the performance of *Harold*, too, has much to recommend it - a fine-toned

soloist, rhythmic, well-balanced orchestral playing and clear, bright recording. There are some especially imaginative touches of tone-painting, for example in the middle of the second movement, where the Pilgrims' chant is intoned with impressive solemnity against a shimmering background of viola arpeggios *sul ponticello*. But I can't place this account on a level with the LSO Live 2003 issue under Colin Davis, with Tabea Zimmermann an outstandingly imaginative, engaging soloist. Davis's direction is more decisive than Ashkenazy's; where Berlioz's phrases tend to meander, he clearly shows the listener the underlying logic. And his extra urgency – maintaining the composer's suggested tempi – makes for more compelling listening than does Ashkenazy's more measured approach.

Duncan Druce

Selected comparison:

T Zimmermann, LSO, C Davis (9/03) (LSOL) LSO0040

Brahms

Symphonies Nos 1-4

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / David Zinman

RCA Red Seal (M) © 88697 93349-2 (166' • DDD)

Recorded live, April 2010



Zinman overlooks the Tonhalle 'creaks' for a live Brahms cycle

Recorded live in Zurich's Tonhalle in April 2010, this is David Zinman's first such project during his 16-year tenure at the orchestra. Fearful that he would not get to record the Brahms symphonies, he was persuaded that the 'somewhat creaky' Tonhalle was viable for live recordings. In the event, there are no creaks or coughs. With clean, well-focused sound and applause happily edited out, this is close to a studio-quality production.

The Tonhalle Orchestra, a kind of Swiss Hallé, is an ensemble of proven pedigree that can be relied upon to deliver honest-to-goodness performances under most circumstances, something more than that on high days and holidays. Here conductor and orchestra rise to greatness in the Fourth Symphony. Elsewhere, they provide the kind of trenchant, well-grounded Brahms performances which have been common currency in Middle Europe since the composer's own time.

As is often the case, the superbly fashioned Second and Fourth symphonies pose fewer interpretative problems than the more emotionally complex First and Third. The Tonhalle Third is all dogged good sense – too dogged in a stickily conducted *Poco allegretto* – with barely a glance at the music's excursions into pathos and personal angst. The enunciation by the winds of the slow movement's anticipation of an idea the finale will later broodingly explore is representative

of a style of playing that doesn't place great emphasis on finely shaded colours.

The First Symphony is given a similarly uncomplicated treatment. For once it really does sound like Beethoven's Tenth. Zinman's tempi are similar to those of former Nikisch pupil Sir Adrian Boult but Boult's shaping of the drama was as dynamic as it was subtle: witness his 1976 Proms performance, recently released on ICA Classics (9/11), a performance that has to be heard to be believed.

Zinman is meticulous in his observation of Brahms's dynamic markings. This makes for some interesting articulation but it can also dislocate the line and disrupt the pulse. Not that this is the primary cause of a somewhat stop-go account of the Second Symphony's opening movement, where I find myself missing the subtly modulated forward motion of Zinman's old mentor Pierre Monteux, who (astonishingly for those days) also took the movement's long exposition repeat (Philips, 11/63 – nla).

What is curious is that in the Fourth Symphony, a work which boasts more hairpins than a gentlewoman's boudoir, Zinman takes a less pedantic view of the markings. The music drives forward with no loss of weight and concentration, with the Tonhalle players displaying qualities of eloquence and imagination which earlier in the cycle are too often held in reserve.

Richard Osborne

Selected comparisons:

Philb Orch, Klempner (1/90*) (EMI) 562742-2

BPO, VPO, Furtwängler (2/96) (EMI) 565513-2

Staatskapelle, K Sanderling (1/97) (RCA) 74321 30367-2

Chausson · d'Indy · Saint-Saëns

Chausson *Soir de fête*, Op 32 d'Indy *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français*, Op 25* Saint-Saëns *Symphony No 2*, Op 55

*Martin Helmchen pf

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Marek Janowski

Pentatone (P) (M) PTC5186 357 (63' • DDD/DSD)



A neglected symphony with rare Romantic fruits

Two works of ripe Romantic élan here frame a relatively early and seldom-performed symphony by Saint-Saëns, all of them played with energy, colour and sensibility by the Suisse Romande Orchestra under Marek Janowski. In 1859, when Saint-Saëns composed his Second Symphony, he was still in his mid-twenties. Almost three decades would pass before he produced the much more famous Third in 1886 but the Second is interesting, not only because it shows Saint-Saëns's thorough grounding in technical matters but also because it reveals

GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

October 1973:

Szell's Brahms symphonies

George Szell's recordings of the Brahms symphonies made with the Cleveland Orchestra in the late 1960s were first issued together in 1973. The digital remasterings are currently available for download via iTunes

Brahms

Symphonies Nos 1-4.

Academic Festival Overture. Tragic Overture

Cleveland Orchestra /

George Szell

CBS (M) © 77356

GRAMOPHONE



All four symphonies, not to mention the two overtures, complete on three discs, you will notice; which must make this set the best value in the catalogue from the economic

point of view. Artistically and for recording, too, it is a good buy. The compression on to three records has led to what, at first sight, seems odd coupling – like starting record 1 with the second movement of Symphony No 2! But things are not as confusing as that suggests and sensible thought has obviously gone into the layout. One symphony, No 3, is complete on one side and I wasn't surprised not to see bands separating the movements.

Szell's performances are very satisfying indeed. His Brahms is robust in strong movements, yet expressive in quiet ones, even if not so deeply emotional as we hear from some conductors. He practically never allows any mannerisms of interpretation, 'points' that can become so tiresome with repeated playing of a record, yet interpretations are never without character. (There are a very few exceptions but they are so slight as to cause little worry.)

The recording is equally satisfactory, with a very clear texture of sound and an excellently strong bass. One used to complain of a lack of soft string-playing in Cleveland recordings but this did not particularly strike me now, even though I had just been listening to the same music from the Vienna Philharmonic under Kertesz on Decca. It's a very different kind of softness from the Decca sound, more open and less hushed; but one special advantage is that you can really hear the notes in soft *pizzicato* passages, often melodic in Brahms, without having to play the record at a very high level. As to the playing, it is very fine; and it is good to be reminded again of this orchestra's soaring violins, its distinguished solo playing, its corporate discipline and rhythm. Very thrilling Brahms.

Trevor Harvey, October 1973, page 115

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where his musical leanings and influences lay. Not for nothing is Saint-Saëns dubbed a French classicist when you hear him intrepidly tackling a fugue in the symphony's opening movement. It is a work that looks back to Beethoven, as well as drawing inspiration from the early 19th-century Romantics. The spirit of Mendelssohn (mixed maybe with Mozart and Haydn) hangs over the exuberant finale, and Schumann would seem to be the model for the *Scherzo*. Stylistically it is perhaps a bit of a melange but the symphony manages to hang together, the more so in a performance where the orchestral playing is so alert to rhythm and so cultured in phrasing, and the overall approach so buoyant.

The luminous orchestral palette of d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* is beautifully defined here, with Martin Helmchen a scintillating partner in the piano solo, and Chausson's *Soir de fête* is given with due rapture and instrumental glow. This is an imaginative programme, performed with panache.

Geoffrey Norris

Currier • Penderecki • Rihm

Currier *Time Machines*^a Penderecki Duo concertante^b Rihm *Lichtes Spiel*^c, *Dyade*^b

Anne-Sophie Mutter *vn* ^bRoman Patkoló *db*

^aNew York Philharmonic Orchestra /

^cMichael Francis, ^aAlan Gilbert

DG © 477 9359GH (64' • DDD)

^aRecorded live ^cNovember 2010, ^aJune 2011



New works played and championed by Mutter

Highly rated star performers can all too easily avoid the farther reaches of contemporary music. These four works written for Anne-Sophie Mutter between 2007 and 2011 are all in their different ways closer to the modern centre ground than the exotic fringes. But it is still gratifying for music lovers keen to escape the staple violin concerto diet to be offered such unusual repertoire in such a high profile CD release: and there is certainly nothing bland about these particular manifestations of centre-ground composition.

Take Sebastian Currier's *Time Machines*, whose seven sections easily deflect gibes about 'mechanical' modernism. Currier (b1959) can call on a polished technique that embraces hints of more familiar American models ranging from Aaron Copland at one extreme to Elliott Carter at the other. There's energy in the eclecticism and if some passages verge on the routine, especially in the way the solo instrument is put through its virtuoso paces, the overall effect is lively and accessible.

Krzysztof Penderecki has gained some notoriety for lengthy neo-romantic effusions

but this *Duo concertante* for violin and double bass is concise and sharply pointed, the two rather different instruments striking sparks off each other in dance-like *scherzo* vein. Together with the Currier, the Duo makes an effective contrast to the more reflective but still outgoing manner of two works by Wolfgang Rihm. In both *Lichtes Spiel* and *Dyade* there's an intriguing ambiguity about the way old and new, tradition and innovation constantly converge and diverge, perhaps as a kind of portrait of the soloist herself and her ever-expanding repertoire. These recordings (live in the case of *Lichtes Spiel* and *Time Machines*) of world premiere performances sound well, with none of the tentativeness that can often afflict the first airings of new compositions.

Arnold Whittall

Delius

Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra^a,

Violin Concerto^a, Cello Concerto^b

^aTasmin Little *vn* ^bPaul Watkins *vc*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sir Arnold Davis

Chandos © CHSA5094 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Little and Watkins revive Delius's concertante works

Some two decades ago Tasmin Little set down memorable versions of both the Violin Concerto and Double Concerto with Sir Charles Mackerras at the helm (for Argo and EMI Eminence respectively). Clearly the intervening years have not diminished her abundant love for and entrancing empathy with this glorious repertoire. Not only does she surmount every technical hurdle with ease, her tone remains wonderfully pure and heart-warmingly expressive. Little's partnership with Paul Watkins strikes me as an especial success; indeed, theirs is the most tenderly lyrical and raptly spontaneous performance of the Double Concerto to have yet come my way (and I do not forget the considerable claims of Little's own earlier recording with Raphael Wallfisch). In the Cello Concerto Watkins resuscitates all except two bars of Delius's altogether more challenging original edition of the solo part. Suffice it to say, he brings a wealth of profound musicality, ardour and insight to bear, making his an interpretation to cherish and one to which I can already see myself returning many times.

Some listeners might quibble with Davis's slightly forceful treatment of the Violin Concerto's introductory bars (a muscular *forte* rather than the *mf* marked in my copy of the miniature score), but it's indicative of the strength of purpose that courses through his beautifully prepared readings – achieved, I should add, without any lack of fragrant

poetry, elegant proportion or instinctive ebb and flow. The orchestral playing is commendably poised throughout, Chandos's SACD sound airy, rich and glowing. No self-respecting Delian can afford to be without this indispensable issue.

Andrew Achenbach

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Little, WNO Orb, Mackerras (7/92^a) (DECC) 478 3078DB8

Double Concerto – selected comparison:

Little, Wallfisch, RLPO, Mackerras (3/92^a) (EMI) 085858-2

Dohnányi

Symphony in F. Zrínyi Overture, Op 2.

Waltz Suite, Op 39

Miskolc Symphony Orchestra / László Kovács

Hungaroton © HCD32684 (67' • DDD)



Hungarian orchestra in Dohnányi showcase

The musical highlight here is the wartime *Waltz Suite*, four separate pieces, all of them abundantly tuneful, the first cast on a fairly symphonic scale, the second resembling a sentimental song, the third a playful *scherzo* alternating different time signatures (hence the title 'Lop-Sided Waltz') and the fourth a Strauss-type waltz medley. Dohnányi himself recorded the piano version but this is my first encounter with the orchestral alternative, which, in terms of its scoring, sports a spruce, well-tailored profile, very much à la Richard Strauss. The performance by the Miskolc Symphony Orchestra under László Kovács fits the bill, just about, but makes me long for a Fischer or Kocsis upgrade.

Both the Symphony and *Zrínyi Overture* won the 20-year-old Dohnányi the Emperor Joseph Prize, the dramatic overture being the stronger piece. The Symphony goes through the predictable motions of German late-Romanticism, though the *Adagio* slow movement is affecting and some points of scoring (the beginning of the *Scherzo*, for example) are fairly original. It's an enjoyable if ephemeral piece but I shan't be running back for more. The recording quality is perfectly adequate. I see from the booklet than Kovács has also recorded Leo Weiner's orchestration of Liszt's B minor Piano Sonata. Now I would certainly like to hear that. Rob Cowan

Glass

'The Concerto Project, Vol 4'

Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra^a.

Piano Concerto, 'Tirol'^b

^aTaim Fain *vn* ^aWendy Sutter *vc* ^aThe Hague

Residentie Orchestra / Jurjen Hempel;

^bStuttgart Chamber Orchestra /

Dennis Russell Davies *pf*

Orange Mountain Music © OMM0077 (60' • DDD)

Poise and power:
Wendy Sutter plays Glass



Glass

Cello Concerto No 1

Wendy Sutter^{vc}

Orchestra of the Americas / Dante Anzolini

Orange Mountain Music © OMM0076 (32' • DDD)



Concertos old and new from the pen of Philip Glass

Glass's Concerto Project has been something of a mixed bag to date (Vol 3 was rather a disappointment – A/08) but there are enough positive signs on the fourth instalment to suggest that artistic concerns have outweighed commercial needs. Two concertos are featured, with the Double Concerto for violin, cello and orchestra composed as recently as 2010. Originally written for the Netherlands Dance Theatre, a synopsis and some images of the original production would have certainly helped provide a context for this work. The Double Concerto does convince on its own terms, however. It is 'double' both in the literal sense of 'two instruments plus orchestra' but also in the traditional way in which the two soloists are made to join forces 'against' the orchestra. The sense of us-and-them is clear in the work's formal scheme which, like Glass's Second Violin Concerto, is set out as three orchestral movements interspersed with shorter sections featuring only solo

instruments. These duets, which open and close the concerto, impart an effective personal tone to the work – almost as if one were eavesdropping on a private conversation.

The *Tirol* Concerto for piano and orchestra (2000) is far more ebullient and extrovert in spirit, with the first and last movements employing dance-like rhythms to dramatic effect. The slow middle movement's large three-section design suggests a concerto within a concerto but Dennis Russell Davies's neat and unfussy playing ensures that the work's overall momentum is not lost.

In contrast, the large-scale three-movement form and orchestration of Glass's Cello Concerto is more 'grand concerto' in design. It therefore recalls the composer's very first concerto, for violin, but its dark and restless qualities suppress the work's expressive powers until it finally springs to life in the third movement. The opening, which features an effective solo passage played with controlled poise and power by Wendy Sutter, and the energetic ending work well but the rest of the work rather passes one by. Sutter imparts both sustained lyricism and a visceral presence throughout. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Gubaidulina

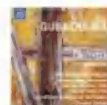
Fachwerk^a. Silenzio^b

Geir Draugsvoll bayan^b Geir Inge Lotsberg vn

^aAnders Loguin perc ^aTrondheim Symphony

Orchestra Strings / Øyvind Gimse^{vc}

Naxos © 8 572772 (56' • DDD)



Gubaidulina pits the bayan against Western strings

In the long list of works by Sofia Gubaidulina, 80 this year, the bayan makes occasional appearances. It is a form of accordion, played with buttons rather than a keyboard, long familiar to her as a folk instrument from her Tatar background. The unusual nature of the button arrangements and hence playing technique has suggested the piece she calls *Fachwerk* (she now lives near Hamburg), more familiar to us as 'half-timbering', in which details of the wooden structure of a building are exposed rather than concealed, often with picturesque effect. She writes that she similarly intends that 'the construction of a certain instrument would become visible and transformed into something of an aesthetic nature'. Perhaps more needs to be explained as to how this differs from a piano keyboard or a violin making certain techniques possible, indeed creatively stimulating, as with Liszt or Paganini studies. Be that as it may, Gubaidulina's fine ear and her skill with subtly arranged and contrasted forms maintain interest in a piece lasting over half an hour, even if this is gentle and contemplative rather than in any way dramatic.

She has also said that, apart from Shostakovich, who gave her great encouragement in difficult Soviet times, an

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important influence on her has been the rather surprising figure of Webern. There is, she says, 'no apparent trace' of them in her music; but in the six miniatures that make up *Silenzio*, though they have no trace of serial technique, there is a somewhat Webernian use of silence and delicately placed sound which draws in the listener's concentration. These are very attentively performed pieces, Geir Draugsvill's bayan blending subtly with the violin and cello. **John Warrack**

Ireland

Piano Concerto^a. Legend^a. Rhapsody No 1. Pastoral. Indian Summer. A Sea Idyll. Three Dances

John Lenehan *pf* ^a**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson**

Naxos © 8 572598 (77' • DDD)



Ireland's outstanding piano concerto set down

I am delighted to welcome to the catalogue a splendid new recording of what is undoubtedly the finest of all British piano concertos, which has not deserved its neglect since it was frequently heard at the Proms in the 1930s and '40s. Worthy to rank with the finest 20th-century works in this form, its poetic lyricism and distinctive melodic inspiration are in the ageless tradition of the greatest English music. After its jiggy first movement it offers one of the most gently beautiful slow movements of any piano concerto written last century, and its bright finale has an indelible main theme that you won't be able to get out of your head once the work concludes. John Lenehan has already recorded a great deal of Ireland's piano music for Naxos with distinction and he is again at his finest here. The *Legend* (written only three years after the concerto) is almost equally memorable. In both works the RLPO is on first-class form under the understanding direction of John Wilson, who is renowned as a passionate advocate of English music (shown again in the excellent anthology 'Made in Britain' praised below on page 69), and the Naxos recording is in the demonstration bracket.

In the solo items, written earlier, Lenehan proves equally responsive. The First Rhapsody, a really impressive work, is passionately virtuosic, and the evocative *Pastoral* makes a pleasing foil to it. *Indian Summer* brings a brief but typically expressive song without words. The early *Sea Idyll* is in three contrasted sections, rhapsodic rather than pictorial, and the Three Dances are folksy, simple but fetchingly contrasted, the closing 'Reapers' Dance' engagingly vigorous, and again the Naxos recording is very real and present. A CD not to be missed by all lovers of English music. **Ivan March**

JP Johnson

Victory Stride. Harlem Symphony. Concerto

Jazz A Mine. American Symphonic Suite - Lament.

Drums: A Symphonic Poem. Charleston

(arr Rimelisi)

Concordia Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Nimbus © NI2745 (70' • DDD)

From MusicMasters originals



Profiling the orchestral side of jazzer Johnson

It's entirely apt that James P Johnson – the most historically significant musician of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance; composer and 'Father of Stride Piano'; mentor of Duke Ellington and Fats Waller – should be remembered for his piano-playing first. As a pianist, Johnson transformed the plod of ragtime into a rhythmically sophisticated 'feel' beyond anything that could be written down. Ragtime morphed into jazz – for definitive revivalist jazz, look no further than Johnson's 1940s Blue Note sides with Edmond Hall and Sidney De Paris. But Johnson the 'symphonic' composer didn't make anything definitive. Marin Alsop bookends Johnson's orchestral works with his earlier jazz compositions *Victory Stride* and the meta-iconic *Charleston* – a shrewd move, as this is where Johnson's art springs from, she tells us, and tap dancer Frederick Boithe is downright taptastic in the *Charleston*.

When he decided to become what jazz musicians refer to as a 'long hair' composer, Johnson wanted a piece of the prestige Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Duke Ellington's early masterpiece miniatures had handed them. But nothing here quite equals Gershwin's striking imagination or Ellington's sense of exquisite self-investigation. *Concerto Jazz A Mine* is a self-conscious attempt to ape *Rhapsody in Blue*; *American Symphonic Suite*, a paraphrase of WC Handy's *St Louis Blues*, even quotes the *Rhapsody*; and the clunky episodic structure of *Harlem Symphony* does its catchy, evocative melodic material no favours.

But *Drums* has a tightness of organisation that is genuinely composerly. Driven forwards by a timpani motif that torches a swirling, tearing-it-up percussion cadenza midway – a moment echoed later with a tumbling flute and timpani duo – Johnson's characteristic rhythmic stride ignites the whole work. It feels satisfyingly unified; idiom-perfect performances, too.

Philip Clark

Mathias • Vaughan Williams

Mathias Piano Concertos – No 1; No 2

Vaughan Williams Fantasy

Mark Bebbington *pf* ^a**Ulster Orchestra / George Vass**

Somm © SOMMCD246 (71' • DDD)



First time on record for British works for piano and orchestra

A late developer, Vaughan Williams took many years to 'find' his voice, and this, it could fairly be said, emerged with the *Tallis Fantasia* and *The Lark Ascending* before the First World War, after he had finally assimilated the influences of Parry, Elgar and Wagner. This early Fantasy for piano and orchestra (edited by Graham Parlett), written in a one-movement form, uncannily anticipates the series of Cobbett 'phantasy' works yet to be composed. Begun in October 1896, though not finished until 1902 (and even later revised), it offers an interesting insight into that lengthy period of gestation the composer experienced from his student years in the mid-1890s and his maturity at almost 40. A work of late-Romanticism at heart, at times unwieldy and stylistically inchoate (like Delius's unsuccessful concerto), it nevertheless provides fascinating glimpses into a future world with its spacious diatonic melodies, and a precedent for that unlikely combination of Wagner, Delius and folksong in *In the Fen Country* of 1904.

The two Mathias piano concertos, performed here with great sensitivity by Bebbington, also provide an important commentary on the Welsh composer's early development and maturity between 1955 and 1961. The First Concerto (edited by his daughter and Geraint Lewis) was written when Mathias was only 20 and reveals a fascinatingly wiry, acerbic mindset which the composer largely jettisoned in his later style. With a greater sense of direction, the four-movement Second Concerto is at once more characteristic of Mathias's individual chemistry of lyricism, mysticism, neo-romanticism and neo-classicism. Full of imaginative, well-contrasted ideas and rich orchestration, it is a work that rivals the stunning Harp Concerto, Op 50, of 1970.

Jeremy Dibble

Mendelssohn

Concerto for Piano and Strings.

Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings^a

Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp* **Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Gottfried von der Goltz** ^a*vn*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2082 (71' • DDD)



Another CD airing for Mendelssohn's proto-concerto

Only recently the Double Concerto appeared in a recording (apparently the first) that revived parts for trumpets and drums. Those parts make marginally less impact here, even though the Harmonia Mundi engineers seem

to work harder at getting inside the orchestra; the Claves recording stands back a little to advantage.

Gottfried von der Goltz's solos are full of the swells we're accustomed to hearing in earlier music, rounded off with a hint of easy *portamento*, but his short-breathed phrasing and vigorous *spiccato* don't feel like concerto-playing, or not when compared with the bravura of Antje Weithaas for Claves. Writing and playing such a piece at the age of 14, Mendelssohn surely wanted to dazzle at least as much as charm his audience, and the Camerata Bern's élan lifts sequences in the first movement that the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra play like passagework. However, both sets tell me my preference would now squarely be for the new/original version of the concerto, and indeed for these recordings, which exult in a Mozartian heritage where their predecessors cringe in the shadow of (say) the C minor and major concertos, K491 and K503.

That sense of a brilliant mind working overtime to explore and then outstrip his models is more impressive still in the 1822 piano concerto, which has hitherto received a bad press and some clattery recordings. Questions of style don't arise with Kristian Bezuidenhout, such is the weight of sonority he draws from this fortepiano (a modern copy of a Graf), his fine touch and taste. The concerto's first movement relies rather heavily on a little arpeggiated figure, sweet and cardboard like an empty box of Mozartkügelchen; von der Goltz and the band point the phrase as a deft and dangerous gesture from the unstoppable teenage Felix. The slow movement's *pizzicato* accompaniment brings further revelation. Do try to hear this.

Peter Quantrill

DBI Conc – selected comparison:

Weithaas, Longuich, Camerata Bern (A/11) (CLAV) 50 1102

Mozart

Clarinet Concerto, K622^a. Clarinet Quintet, K581^b

^aIsabelle van Keulen, Ulrike-Anima Mathé vns ^bVolker Jacobsen va ^cGustav Rivinius vc ^dAustro-Hungarian

Haydn Philharmonic / Sharon Kam *basset cl*

Berlin Classics © 0016672BC (58' • DDD)



Israeli clarinetist in Mozart with a basset

Sharon Kam is a clarinetist with an exceptionally wide expressive range. Here she couples the two Mozart masterpieces inspired by the playing of Anton Stadler, a most apt coupling. In the Concerto she opts for directing the orchestra from the solo instrument and it bears witness to her success that she opts for fast *Allegros*, with strikingly crisp ensemble. The first movement of the

Clarinet Concerto is neat, with nicely graduated dynamics allowing for beautiful echo phrases. So too in the central *Adagio*, with the reprise even softer than the first statement of the lovely main theme. Like many recent clarinetists she opts to use a basset clarinet, so allowing the extra lower notes to be played at the (supposedly) written pitch. The finale is brisk and sparkling, with witty pointing of rhythm.

The Clarinet Quintet with a quartet of solo string-players is similarly successful, with the second-movement *Larghetto* poised and pure as in the concerto's slow movement, with clarinet and first violin interweaving delightfully. Kam then plays the third-movement Minuet with a spring in her step, with delightful rhythmic pointing in the second Ländler-like Trio. The variations of the finale in some ways present the most problematic interpretative problems but it says much for Kam and her partners that they make each variation sound fresh and new, so that one welcomes the many repeats. They round off the work with an exhilarating account of the brisk final coda. Altogether a brilliantly successful disc of this very desirable coupling, very well recorded.

Edward Greenfield

Mozart

Horn Concertos – No 1, K412/514 (K386b);

No 2, K417; No 3, K447; No 4, K495

Alessio Allegrini *hn*

Orchestra Mozart / Claudio Abbado

DG © 477 8083GH (53' • DDD)



Allegrini joins Abbado for Mozart's horn concertos

Horn tone mellifluous or rough-edged from Alessio Allegrini, but his orchestral counterparts in K417 and K495 are, like the woodwinds, subdued in a slightly distant balance. The clarinets in K447, for instance, don't register as well as they might, but violins are separated and the solo instrument is always very present. Allegrini can take the spotlight because he is an exceptional artist.

Claudio Abbado, if not quite as uplifting as he was for the violin concertos (9/08), is nevertheless on his mettle, though little interested in the Rondo second movement of K412; excusably so, because it's by Süßmayr, who instead of finishing Mozart's torso – 40 fully scored bars, a complete draft of the solo part and sketches – substituted a composition of his own based on the main motif. Back with Mozart, Abbado's resilient rhythm and themes shrewdly differentiated in the first movement of K417 offer Allegrini a framework for remarkably secure playing. Remarkably varied in colour too, changing cast as the music modulates through four

minor keys from B flat minor before arriving at the recapitulation (2'56"-3'49"). Add in an artistically phrased, softly spoken *Andante* and a stimulating 6/8 finale, all representative of the quality of a disc which, apart from a few inconsistencies, offers good sound too.

If you also like the zesty natural horn, Teunis van der Zwart and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra will fulfil wishes – with a bonus: Mozart's Rondo for K412 considerably reconstructed by Torsten Johann, and far superior to Süßmayr.

Nalen Anthoni

K412, K495 – selected comparison:

Van der Zwart, Freiburg Baroque Orch, Von der Goltz (10/07) (HARM) HMC90 1946

Mozart

Symphonies – No 9, K73; No 10, K74; K81; No 11, K84; K95; K97

Danish National Chamber Orchestra / Adam Fischer

Dacapo © 6 220538 (54' • DDD/DSD)



Ninth volume but third issue in the Danish Mozart cycle

First, a puzzle. The booklet-note says 'We have consulted Neal Zaslaw's outstanding studies (*Mozart's Symphonies*; Oxford: 1989) and have chosen the 44 symphonies that scholarship regards as authentic'. Zaslaw however queries the authenticity of four of the works here. He believes that K81 is possibly by Leopold Mozart, and that attribution is uncertain for K84, K95 and K97 – which leaves K73 and K74 as genuine.

Such doubts don't seem to trouble Adam Fischer, infectiously alive to interpretative possibilities, a positive feel for style (violins are separated) and a sharp ear for ensemble balance. Mozart's first C major symphony, K73, explodes into being, ferocious in momentum and brassy dynamic thrust. If Mozart had wanted to quell a talkative audience, this performance would have done so instantly. In contrast, the slow movement is lyrically shaped, the flutes given their due. K97 may be of dubious provenance but there is no suspicion of apologia in Fischer's interpretation. Although it is a four-movement work, he, like Zaslaw, sees the opening *Allegro* as 'an Italian overture in spirit'; and spirited it is too, superb in dramatic attack and refined in modification of tempi to suit fleeting changes of mood within the movement.

Fischer's commitment is passionate. So is the orchestra's response; and though timpani (inexplicably omitted in K95) could have been better defined, Dacapo's wide-ranging SACD sound won't stand in your way. What matter are origins. Why not simply love these works as six among the 16,558 symphonies written in the 18th century? **Nalen Anthoni**



Astute accompanists:
Claudio Abbado and
Orchestra Mozart

PHOTOGRAPHY: DG

Pettersson

Symphonies – No 1 (ed C Lindberg); No 2

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra / Christian Lindberg

BIS Ⓢ ② (CD + DVD) BIS-CD1860 (78' + 59' • DDD)

Bonus DVD includes 'Allan Pettersson – The First Symphony', a film by David Lindberg

Pettersson

Concerto No 3 for String Orchestra

Nordic Chamber Orchestra / Christian Lindberg

BIS Ⓢ BIS-CD1590 (54' • DDD)



Pettersson's First is heard at last

The mystery of Allan Pettersson's First Symphony has long intrigued devotees of his music. Composed mostly in 1951, the score was never completed, set aside for No 2 (1952-53), returned to fitfully in the 1950s and subsequently left a 136-page double-barred rump, more fragmentary even than Schubert's Seventh, with a 16-bar hiatus in the centre. Even CPO's complete symphonies set (4/07) omitted No 1 – a score Pettersson refused permission to be examined and his widow to allow to be played.

But played it now has been, in a fascinating 'performing edition' prepared by Christian Lindberg, whose affinity with Pettersson's idiom is manifest with each succeeding recording, aided by Truls Nilsson and Ulf Blomqvist. Lindberg determined to add no extraneous material but fix on a specific

version of the score and present it, lacunae, warts and all, to an audience and let them fill in the blanks. It is a striking approach which would not work with every unfinished piece but here succeeds remarkably well. The Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, who have a fine Pettersson tradition (I recall a magnificent No 6 under Okko Kamu on CBS Masterworks), play with total concentration and commitment. David Lindberg's hugely informative film on the bonus DVD is a model of a truly musical documentary.

The Second Symphony receives a fine performance, more vividly caught than on Alun Francis's for CPO, though in truth there is little to choose between them. Stig Westerberg's pioneering 1966 account is five minutes faster and benefits from his tauter direction but BIS's sound is much the finer. The Third Concerto (1956-57) is built on an even larger scale and is one of his deepest utterances, an extraordinary structure with two substantial outer movements framing an extraordinary *Mesto* (which can be played independently; a recording was reissued coupled with Westerberg's account of No 2 on Swedish Society Discofil in 1992). Even more gripping than its two predecessors (9/09), it carves its way through the best part of an hour in compelling fashion in this flawlessly presented recording. **Guy Rickards**

Symphony No 2 – comparative versions:

Swedish Rad SO, Westerberg (3/75*) (SWED) SLT33219

BBC Scottish SO, Francis (4/95) (CPO) CPO999 281-2

Prokofiev • Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Symphony No 1, 'Classical' Tchaikovsky

Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op 33^a

^aMiklós Perényi vc

Manchester Camerata / Gábor Takács-Nagy

Avie Ⓢ AV2243 (33' • DDD)



A rare outing for the 'original' Rococos

Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations continues to be one of his most popular pieces, beloved of cellists as well as their audiences. Yet, oddly, what Tchaikovsky wrote is very seldom played. It is here. The familiar version, reshuffling the order of the variations, omitting one of them and recomposing various bits, was the work of his cellist friend Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, rather reluctantly issued by his publisher friend Pyotr Jürgenson. Tchaikovsky himself, asked what he felt about the matter, brushed the question impatiently aside with 'To the devil with it! Let it stand as it is'. All the same, it is good to have the chance of hearing the original (other recordings are by Raphael Wallfisch with Geoffrey Simon, Steven Isserlis with John Eliot Gardiner and Julian Lloyd Webber with Maxim Shostakovich). Miklós Perényi plays with suitably rococo elegance, in a manner closer to chamber music than to a concerto, and the recording responds to this by not setting him too far in front of the excellent Manchester Camerata and keeping their

individual contributions clear. The result is an attractive, companionable performance. The slow waltz is gently, even ruminatively played, and the popular D minor variation (one of those that Fitzenhagen shifted to a new position) handled with a light touch and with some nice woodwind comments.

The opening *Allegro* of Prokofiev's symphony is taken a little slowly, without loss of charm, whereas the finale turns into a bit of a race for home, if one in which the speeding orchestra acquits itself well. In between, the *Larghetto* is gracefully done, though the Gavotte sounds more like a rustic Ländler than the courtly dance Prokofiev was emulating. **John Warrack**

Tchaikovsky – selected comparisons:

Wallfisch, Simon (2/85) (CHAN) CHAN8347

Isserlis, COE, Gardiner (10/90) (VIRG) 561490-2*

Lloyd Webber, LSO, M Sostakovich

(4/99) (PHIL) 462 115-2PM2

Saariaho

Clarinet Concerto, 'D'om le vrai sens'.

Laterna magica. Leino Songs^o

^o**Anu Komsa sop** • **Kari Kriikku c / Finnish Radio**

Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo

Online © ODE1173-2 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Recent pieces from the 'grande dame' of Finnish composition

As Kaija Saariaho approaches her 60th birthday, her music continues to extend in range and depth. Susana Välimäki's moving note in the booklet concerning the Clarinet Concerto *D'om le vrai sens* (2010) raised expectations hugely and the resulting work does not disappoint. Cast in six interlinked movements, the concerto (the subtitle renders roughly as 'Man's true sense') explores the five senses as depicted in the medieval tapestry series *The Lady and the Unicorn*. Hearing, Sight, Smell, Touch and Taste form a chain that resolves in the concluding *A mon seul désir* (an anagram of the title) in a remarkable synthesis and development of the work's content. Kriikku is invited, Musgrave-like, to move around the auditorium and audience in a live performance and though the recording does not really capture this spatial aspect little musically is lost.

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra partner Kriikku admirably in this enchanting concerto and under Oramo's sensitive direction provide beguiling accompaniments for Anu Komsa in the four *Leino Songs* (2007) that conclude the programme. These delicate settings of Eino Leino's 'Looking at you', 'The Heart', 'Peace' and 'Evening Prayer' (to give their English titles) make a beautifully refined set, mutually supportive one for the others, almost a *Four Last Songs* for the 21st century – although one hopes Saariaho will

continue to write solo song sets. Komsa, for whom they were written, proves an exemplary executant.

In between lies *Laterna magica* (2008), a purely orchestral fantasy inspired by Ingmar Bergman and the old magic lantern projectors. The result is a filigree tone-poem with a soul of steel that showcases the Finnish orchestra splendidly. Ondine's demonstration sound caps a marvellous issue. Recommended.

Guy Rickards

Schubert • Tchaikovsky • Bruch

Bruch Romance, Op 85 **Schubert** Arpeggione Sonata (arr D Tabakova) **Tchaikovsky** Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op 33 (arr Rysanov)

Maxim Rysanov va

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Muhai Tang

BIS © BIS-SACD1843 (52' • DDD/DSD)



Rysanov invents new repertoire for his viola

Maxim Rysanov commissioned the present arrangement of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata from the Plovdiv-born, London-based composer Dobrinka Tabakova (b1980). Tastefully laid out for viola and string orchestra, it emerges as a disconcertingly squeaky-clean exercise, an impression which, oddly enough, chimes at least in part with Tabakova's own description (quoted in the booklet) of 'weaving out Schubert's perfectly constructed lines and melodies and transferring them to the orchestra – it almost felt like musical crosswords as each line found its own voice in the strings'. Rysanov himself fashioned the substantially more straightforward overhaul of Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations, leaving the orchestral score entirely intact and merely deciding 'which passages to leave in the original register and which to put an octave higher'. Even so, some variations work better than others: the meltingly lovely No 3, for example, comes as soothing balm after its now rather uncomfortably slick-sounding predecessor. Bruch's F major Romance comprises an extremely fetching if none-too-generous makeweight.

Needless to say, Rysanov plays with consummate artistry and stylish aplomb throughout. I can also confirm that he benefits from razor-sharp yet always warmly affectionate backing from an eager Swedish CO under the excellent Muhai Tang, to say nothing of BIS's stunningly natural engineering (the SACD layer in particular offers sound and balance of breathtaking realism). So, if the concept and/or programme appeals, by all means investigate; just don't expect any great revelations.

Andrew Achenbach

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Mahler's Second from Lyons

As we went to press the results of Leonard Slatkin's September performances of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony with the Orchestre National de Lyon were being edited, as reported by producer Phil Rowlands on his Twitter feed. We expect the results on Naxos next year.

• Musgrave on the Hill

Also courtesy of Twitter messaging, we hear of some fruitful sessions at Champs Hill finishing just as we went to press. Nicholas Daniel's performance of Thea Musgrave's *Niobe* for tape and oboe was described by the producer as having 'amazing finesse'. We'll hear it for ourselves when Champs Hill release the disc.

• Turnage Download

Resonus Classics set up its microphones at St Augustine's church in Kilburn in late November to record music by Mark-Anthony Turnage with tenor Nicky Spence and Chamber Domaine, conducted by Thomas Kemp (see picture below). The recordings will be released by the download-only label in January.



• Four strings Langgaard

The string quartets of Rued Langgaard began taping in the old radio concert hall in Copenhagen this summer. The female players of the Nightingale Quartet are making the recordings, the first of which is due for UK release late this year on Dacapo. See the label's YouTube channel for a tantalising preview.

• Karabits conducts Dvořák

Kirill Karabits and his Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra have recently recorded Dvořák's Seventh Symphony at the Lighthouse in Poole in the latest addition to their discography for Onyx. Exact release date is to be confirmed.

• Mozart from Jacobs

A cast including Jeremy Ovenden and Sunhae Im recently joined René Jacobs and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra under the Harmonia Mundi microphones for a new recording of Mozart's *La finta giardiniera*. The results will be released in the UK in the autumn of 2012.

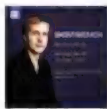
Shostakovich

Symphonies – No 6; No 12, 'The Year 1917'

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

Naxos © 8 572658 (70' • DDD)



Latest from the Liverpool Shostakovich powerhouse

With the Sixth and Twelfth Symphonies, the RLPO harnesses one of the most profoundly thought-out of Shostakovich's conceptions to one of the least. Petrenko seems determined to insist on that dichotomy. So the opening movement of No 6 comes in at an extremely distended 19'45" – those on my shelves range from 13'28" (Kondrashin) to 18'31" (Rostropovich, who could generally be relied on to stretch slow tempi to breaking point). So far as I'm concerned, almost any tempo in Shostakovich is OK in principle, so long as there is tension in the air. But here the opening section merely plods, and for all the orchestra's efforts there is virtually no sense of phrasing, at least until the movement belatedly gets into its stride and the RLPO woodwind have a chance to shine. To be frank, I found it quite hard to get to the end; and I never thought I would say that of any Petrenko performance, least of all in his generally admirable Shostakovich cycle. The two fast movements go better, with some especially tasty *portamentos* in the finale. But even here the conception is flabby and marred by touches of uncertain pacing.

Curiously, the introduction to No 12 suffers from the same over-ponderous approach. And it's such a shame, because the rest goes rather well, all the way from the coiled nerviness of 'Revolutionary Petrograd' to the radiant 'Dawn of Humanity'.

David Fanning

Shostakovich • Tchaikovsky • Rimsky-Korsakov

Shostakovich Symphony No 10^a

Rimsky-Korsakov The Legend of the Invisible

City of Kitezh^b – Prelude: A Hymn to Nature;

Tartar Invasion and Battle of Kershenets

Tchaikovsky The Snow Maiden – Melodrama^c

USSR State Symphony Orchestra / Evgeni Svetlanov

ICA Classics ^amono © ICAC5036 (62' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,

August ^a21, ^c22 & ^b30, 1968

Shostakovich • Ligeti

Shostakovich Symphony No 10

Ligeti Atmosphères

Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester / David Afkham

Orfeo © C979 111B (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg,

August 2010



Shostakovich's Tenth from old guard and young gun

Diligent collectors have been able to trace the history of Shostakovich's masterpiece in detail, starting with the typically slapdash playing of the composer himself at the piano alongside Mieczysław Weinberg in 1954. From orchestral pioneers such as Dimitri Mitropoulos via slower-burn Brahmsians like Bernard Haitink to today's East-West fusions, of which Vasily Petrenko's Award-winning Naxos disc (1/11) is a superb example, its discography is rich indeed. My own candidate for top spot would be Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic as captured in their Moscow concert of May 1969. The music-making lives up to the hype surrounding a historic and not uncontroversial visit.

During the Soviet era, Evgeni Svetlanov's 1968 Proms appearances were widely considered not so much legendary as notorious. Unlike his soloist in the first of them, the great Mstislav Rostropovich, whose first-half Dvořák Cello Concerto has already been disinterred for a BBC Legends issue (7/03), the maestro was regarded as something of an apparatchik. Yet now that the Communist regime has fallen and conductors of like stature are in short supply we tend to view him more kindly. Was his attitude any different from that of the many musicians from Stravinsky to Richard Strauss prepared to compromise with the authorities to secure their own artistic power base?

The present disc has indisputable documentary significance. With Soviet bloc tanks newly arrived on the streets of Prague on August 21, 1968, the Shostakovich (on paper less sympathetically emotive than the Dvořák preceding it) risked being seen as 'oppressor's music'. The atmosphere in the Royal Albert Hall was palpably tense, Svetlanov launching the piece amid shouts of protest – not quite the planned disruption such as nowadays is facilitated by modern technology. It has been suggested that he went on to give the performance of his life. I am not so sure. A conductor who did much for other Soviet composers had a curious relationship with Shostakovich, presenting only selected scores in primary colours, making them seem oddly one-dimensional. He delivers a compelling interpretation of the Tenth, but the first movement has nothing like Karajan's sense of grip while the shadowy third is surely too swift, lacking inwardness. It is fascinating to revisit the brutal power and timbral specificity of Svetlanov's archetypally Soviet band. Yet as in his official Melodiya

release, which older readers may remember from its incarnation on LP as the first version to appear in the UK in stereo (HMV/Melodiya, 10/68), it isn't all plain sailing. Even in the *scherzo* some assiduously demarcated rhythms come over as jaunty and disconnected. Svetlanov's positivism suits the finale better than the rest of the work: he always played the quiet opening of the movement with surprising poetry and finesse, and certainly brings the house down thereafter. The makeweights will be neither here nor there for most admirers although the raw-sounding Rimsky-Korsakov items are a welcome reminder of a magnificent opera too often overlooked in the West. The sound is serviceable, better than the privately sourced concerto tape mentioned above.

Flash forward to 2010 and David Afkham, the GMJO and the sound team of Austrian Radio are incomparably more refined and precise. The young conductor (*b*1983) first sprang to prominence in the UK with his 2008 triumph in the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition. The Salzburg Festival date immortalised here came with his winning the first Nestlé and Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award. The orchestra is a wonderfully responsive body of young musicians but I have to say that I find the reading anonymous. Even if the Tenth is not one of the Shostakovich symphonies that requires sandblasting sonorities to make its proper impact, the expression needs to be edgier. Afkham keeps the music moving. The other-worldly pseudo-electronic timbres of Ligeti's *Atmosphères* (sampled by a wide audience in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*) have regularly graced the band's touring programmes. Here the concluding passage, in which lightly brushed piano strings fade into silence, also encompasses the sound of a passing aircraft. Applause is retained.

David Gutman

Shostakovich – selected comparison:

BPO, Karajan (7/09) (MELO) MELCD100 1513

Sibelius • Lutosławski

Lutosławski Concerto for Orchestra^a

Sibelius Pohjola's Daughter^b. Symphony No 5^b

London Philharmonic Orchestra /

Jukka-Pekka Saraste

LPO © LPO0057 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,

^aFebruary, ^bOctober 2008



Saraste in live concert excerpts with the LPO

Who is it for, this odd coupling drawn from two concerts given in 2008? Supporting the project is the Polska Music grant programme of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, tasked with

enhancing the visibility of Polish classical music in the wider world. And it is not just concert attendees who will be pleased to have this spectacularly deft and rigorous account of Lutosławski's Concerto for Orchestra on disc. Of course, there are many fine studio recordings of a piece which has latterly found a more secure place in the international repertoire than the challenging works of the composer's maturity. But Saraste is in his element here, clarifying the composer's bejewelled textural mosaics while driving forwards and generally inspiring the players to give of their very best. The performance is tauter than Lutosławski's own from the mid-1970s, still available on EMI, and the concluding applause is not excised.

The Sibelius items seem less competitive. With two complete symphony cycles to his credit, Saraste is an old Sibelius hand whose crisp, forthright manner is certainly not the only way to tackle these works. The 'lone wolf howling in a faraway forest' which Andrew Mellor evokes in the booklet-notes barely features. There's scarcely a hint of mystery in this civilised music-making, nor will you find the kind of theatricality associated with Leonard Bernstein's mid-1960s LP pairing of these scores. Perhaps Saraste feels that such effortful readings tell us more about the composer's struggle to perfect his composition than the Apollonian end result. Bright and efficient notwithstanding some smudging at climactic points, Saraste eschews the monumental.

As usual with this label, sound quality is impressive, certainly less parched and pungent than what one hears from a stalls seat in the hall. For real *pianissimos* you can always opt for Osmo Vänskä who, having conducted all the symphonies live in concert with the LPO as elsewhere, is setting down his own second cycle for BIS in Minnesota.

David Gutman

Lutosławski – selected comparison:

Polish Nat Rad SO, Lutosławski (7/79°) (EMI) 907226-2

Stanford

'The Romantic Cello Concerto, Vol 3'

Cello Concerto. Rondo. Ballata and Ballabile, Op 160. Irish Rhapsody No 3, Op 137

Gemma Rosefield vc

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Manze
Hyperion © CDA67859 (70' • DDD)



British cellist champions Stanford's concertos

Extraordinary to think that such an appealing work as Stanford's 1880 Cello Concerto should have been allowed to languish neglected for so long. Only the slow movement was performed in the composer's lifetime; indeed, not until Lyrita recorded it

in the early 1990s with Alexander Baillie as soloist was the piece performed in its entirety. Turning to this welcome newcomer, we find that Gemma Rosefield is every bit Baillie's equal. She plays with disarming character and freshness; her technique, too, is enviably sure and tone beguilingly rounded. I also think that her cadenza – a good deal less protracted than Baillie's – works better in the context of a such a neatly constructed work. Perhaps there's a touch more personality about the RPO's contribution under Nicholas Braithwaite than the BBC Scottish SO's for Andrew Manze, as well as an extra skip and twinkle about the finale. Otherwise, we're talking swings and roundabouts: aficionados will naturally want to possess both versions.

The concerto is pre-dated here by the Rondo in F major from 1869, a wholly engaging, Schumannesque essay written for Wilhelm Elsner, a German-born tutor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin (Stanford's birthplace), and a conspicuously precocious achievement for a 16-year-old. The *Irish Rhapsody* No 3 is a much later offering from 1913, one of two *concertante* specimens in Stanford's series of seven, its heartfelt and songful first section leading to a boisterous jig. Like Raphael Wallfisch and Vernon Handley before them, Rosefield and Manze do the piece proud. They also bring a comparable sensitivity and copious flair to the *Ballata and Ballabile*, a typically resourceful and charming diptych composed in 1918 for Beatrice Harrison. Admirable sound and truthful balance; another Hyperion winner!

Andrew Achenbach

Vc Conc – selected comparison:

Baillie, RPO, Braithwaite (A/07) (LYRI) SRCD321

Irish Rhapsody – selected comparison:

Wallfisch, Ulster Orch, Handley (11/90) (CHAN) CHAN8861

Stravinsky

Arensky Nuits égyptiennes **Glazunov** Raymonda – Entrée des Sarrazins; Danse orientale. The Seasons, Op 67 – Bacchanale **Grieg** Lyric Pieces, Op 71 – No 3, Puck (Småtroll) (orch B Mantovani) **Sinding** Oriental Dance, Op 32 No 5 (orch C Piper)
Stravinsky The Firebird (1910 version)

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Musicales Actes Sud © ASMO6 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Cité de la Musique, Paris, October 2010



Roth's period instrument band turns to Stravinsky

Les orientales was a potpourri of quasi-oriental dances assembled by Diaghilev (for, among others, Nijinsky and Karsavina) in Paris in 1910 with music and orchestrations by various hands. It is played here with suitable flamboyance. And *The Firebird* was, of course, the great ballet sensation of that year. It is

played here with a difference. The intention is for it to sound as it did to those first, dazzled Paris audiences. The booklet-note describes at length how immense trouble has been taken to revive or reconstruct instruments of the period, arguing, for example, that 'Stravinsky wrote with the particular tonal qualities of narrow-bore French trumpets and trombones, the valve horn and piquant woodwind instruments clearly in mind'. All the usual 'authenticity' questions are raised about how much this really guided him. One point: the French style of horn-playing was probably then already developing what performers liked to call a silvery shimmer (something the Russians copied), and which later went out of fashion as excessively wobbly vibrato. When I heard Stravinsky conduct the *Firebird* Suite in London in 1965, he certainly did not insist on that being revived. It is not revived here, nor would one wish it to be. The beautifully played horn solo in the final movement sounds right with minimal vibrato.

What we do have is an excellently played, brightly recorded performance of the ballet, conducted with verve by François-Xavier Roth. Certainly the orchestra has a clarity which gives a well-lit quality to Stravinsky's Rimsky-Korsakovian orchestration, his model, and there is no lack of vitality with movements such as Kashchey's dance. Well worth hearing. **John Warrack**

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 5

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck

Exton © OVCL00443 (46' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh, May 2006



More from Honeck's irrepressible Pittsburghers

Hot on the heels of Honeck's ear-popping Mahler Third comes this fiery and impassioned Tchaikovsky Fifth. Clearly what's happening in Pittsburgh demands that attention be paid. You can feel the force of Honeck's personality from the moody and atmospheric opening bars: as that lachrymose clarinet announces the all-pervasive 'fate' motif there's real sense of awareness of the keening harmony surrounding it and the tension that it engenders – properly auspicious.

With the arrival of the *Allegro con anima* and its yearning second theme, Honeck carries the rubato to almost Mravinsky-like excess while pressing the ensuing *accelerando* in marked dramatic contrast. There's plenty of visceral excitement in the *tutti*s but equally a keen sense of dynamic gradation to prevent them all from sounding exactly the same (a common failing in this movement). What

especially impressed me here was the really quiet and euphonious brass-playing – like the chorale-like moments at the opening of the finale. They make as much of an impression throughout the performance as Honeck's big-boned *fortissimos*.

The second-movement *Andante cantabile* begins and ends with an all-embracing hush, the solo clarinet's pay-off as finely tuned and poetic as the auspiciously soft-grained solo horn. How rarely we hear that famous solo begin so quietly. Likewise the woodwind solos of the central section, attended here with such finesse.

Honeck doesn't flinch from pulling out the big guns in the finale (arriving *attacca* after the preceding waltz) – the *Allegro vivace* really fizzles with vivid timpani punctuation and each successive climax arrives with imperial splendour and burnished horns. In the coda, Honeck takes to reversing Tchaikovsky's instructions by putting on a spurt at the *meno mosso* in the horns – but nobody in the vociferous Pittsburgh audience is counting, and perhaps neither should we.

Edward Seckerson

Tchaikovsky

Symphonies Nos 4-6

Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre / Valery Gergiev
Mariinsky © DVD MAR0513

(150' • NTSC • 16:9 • 5.1 & DD stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Salle Pleyel, Paris, January 2010



Three symphonies on DVD live from Paris

One man's meat is another man's poison, so I'd better state straight away that the visuals are not to my tastes. The camera is nearly always on the move and there are far too many fussy camera angles, edits and wearily distracting close-ups to contend with. Lighting, colour and tint differ from performance to performance; indeed, there's a (deliberately?) deathly pallor to skin tone in the *Patbétique*. Early on in the Fourth, a conspicuously naff freeze-frame on Gergiev's face followed by a choice example of his peculiar brand of right-hand wobble momentarily made me wonder whether my DVD player was suffering from some kind of judder. Whatever you think of his rostrum manner, however, Gergiev certainly knows how to get what he wants, and his dedicated Mariinsky forces are with him every step of the way.

These are keenly voiced performances of plentiful character, intrepid incident and abundant temperament, occasionally infuriating, yes, but seldom aloof. As is so often the case, the first movement of the Fourth takes a little while to hit full stride; only in the development do the sparks really begin to fly. Gergiev's handling of the slow

movement's outer sections feels a touch sticky, whereas the marvellous F major tune at its heart blossoms fulsomely. Both the *Scherzo* and finale have charisma and excitement by the spade. Although this new Fifth is a more wilful affair than Gergiev's own VPO version for Philips, it still packs a visceral wallop and the Russian maestro's identification with his countryman's music is total. He plots a surer course through the *Pathétique* without any loss in edge-of-seat drama or soulful intensity, though his self-consciously treacly treatment of the first movement's sublime second subject and glowering central climax will, I fancy, irk on repetition.

The actual sound, whether in stereo or surround, is first-class. Gergiev acolytes need not tarry; the rest should approach with an element of caution.

Andrew Achenbach

Selected comparison:

VPO, Gergiev (8/05) (PHIL) 475 6315PX3

Vaughan Williams

Symphony No 8. Job: A Masque for Dancing

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult

Video director Roy Tipping

ICA Classics © DVD ICAD5037 (73' • NTSC • 4:3 • O)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,
October 12, 1972



RVW's centenary concert filmed at the Festival Hall

The scene is the Royal Festival Hall, London. The occasion is a concert to mark the centenary of Vaughan Williams's birth – 100 years to the day, on October 12, 1972. The orchestra is the London Philharmonic; the conductor is Sir Adrian Boult, VW's most distinguished living champion, the dedicatee of the concert's final item and, at 83, the same age as VW when he completed his Eighth Symphony. The BBC recording, broadcast six days later, does not include the National Anthem, with which all Royal Philharmonic Society concerts open, nor, alas, *On Wenlock Edge* with tenor Richard Lewis, as the BBC did not film it.

The DVD thus begins – and somewhat disconcertingly – with Sir Adrian arriving on the podium and looking distinctly annoyed with something in the auditorium. After a whispered exchange with leader Rodney Friend, we're off into the shortest but one of the most fascinating and arguably underrated of VW's symphonies: four movements labelled *Fantasia* (Variations without a theme), *Scherzo alla marcia* (for wind instruments alone), *Cavatina* (for strings alone) – its theme resembles the chorale 'O sacred head sore wounded' – and *Toccata*, with its array of percussion instruments. But

it is *Job* that is the highlight (and main selling point) of the DVD, a wonderfully robust performance with selected images from Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* punctuating the telecast, the Festival Hall organ contributing a startling *coup de théâtre* in 'A Vision of Satan' and Sir Adrian guiding the conclusion of 'his' work to a trademark VW *niente* that is quite spellbinding.

In one sense, he is the least interesting of conductors to watch, the very antithesis of Bernstein's terpsichorean style and perhaps only rivalled in economy of gesture and facial expression by Richard Strauss; on the other hand, one constantly wonders how he achieves the miraculous effects he does by such minimal means. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Vaughan Williams • McEwen



McEwen Viola Concerto Vaughan Williams *Flos campi*, Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra

Lawrence Power vs BBC National Chorus and
Orchestra of Wales / Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion © CDA67839 (77' • DDD)



Power and Brabbins unite for British viola gems

As Lewis Foreman explains in his very informative notes, this disc is effectively a tribute to the work and vision of the viola player Lionel Tertis, who commissioned all three works featured here. It is good to hear McEwen's Viola Concerto of 1901 given a performance of such conviction. A pioneering work that predates the substantial British Romantic chamber works for viola by Bowen and Dale, the Concerto gave Tertis the opportunity to project his instrument across a large-scale, ambitious three-movement structure, its rhetoric common to many late-19th-century concertos, yet the register and tone of the viola generate a different sound world in which McEwen's rich orchestration gently yet sumptuously supports the solo instrument. Lawrence Power's playing is wonderfully varied, at times delicate and poetical, at others broad, passionate and generous.

This is especially so in the case of the two works by Vaughan Williams. Though I admit to a special fondness for Willcocks's 1964 recording of *Flos campi*, with the radiant, numinous sound of King's College Choir, Power's intonation, tone and interpretative insight have the edge over that of Cecil Aronowitz, especially in the lyrically expansive paragraphs. But Power (and Brabbins, who exercises his usual imaginative flair and masterly orchestral control in this repertoire) is at his best in the Suite of 1934. Here the very sound of the viola seems to articulate that quintessential voice of the

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SEÁN Ó RIADA: ORCHESTRAL WORKS

RTÉ lyric fm CD136



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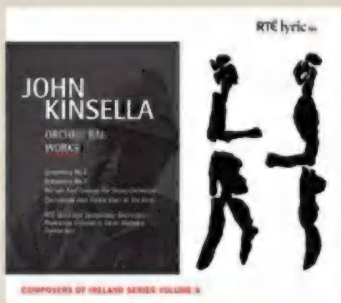
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JOHN KINSELLA: ORCHESTRAL WORKS

RTÉ lyric fm CD134



RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra/ Proinnsias Ó Duinn & Gavin Maloney conductors. *Symphony No. 6, Symphony No. 7, Prelude and Toccata for string orchestra, Cúchulainn and Ferdia: Duel at the Ford*

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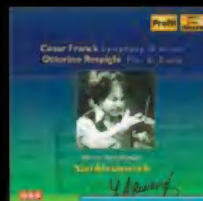
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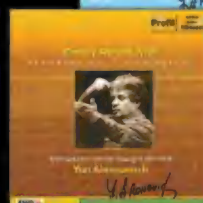
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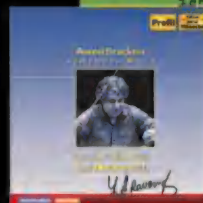
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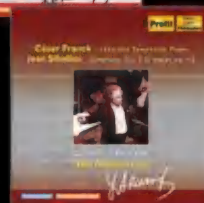
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composer: the generous paraphrase of Bach in the Prelude, the simple melody of the 'Carol', the heavenly aura of the 'Ballad', the mercurial élan of the 'Moto perpetuo' and the deeply innocent 'Musette'. This is a 'must have' for all lovers of Vaughan Williams and British music in general! **Jeremy Dibble**

Flos campi – selected comparison:

Aronowitz, Jacques Orsch, Willcocks (2/70th) (EMI) 567221-2

Vivaldi • Caldara

Caldara Sinfonias – No 6, 'Sant' Elena al Calvario'; No 12, 'La Passione di Gesù Signor nostro' **Vivaldi** Cello Concertos – RV409; RV412; RV416; RV419; RV424. Concerto for Strings, RV114. Concerto for Two Violins and Cello, Op 3 No 11 RV565. Dorilla in tempe – Sinfonia

Jean-Guihen Queyras *vc*

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Georg Kallweit *vn*
Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2095 (69' • DDD)

Vivaldi • Leo • Platti

Leo Cello Concerto No 1 **Platti** Cello Concerto, WD657 **Vivaldi** Cello Concertos – RV416; RV420; RV423. Cello Sonata, RV42

Sol Gabetta *vc* Cappella Gabetta / Andres Gabetta
Sony Classical © 88697 93230-2 (71' • DDD)



Baroque Italian concertos from cellists Queyras and Gabetta

With 27 works to choose from, it's no surprise that these two programmes, both centred on Vivaldi's cello concertos, have only one work in common. The playing of the G minor Concerto, RV416, neatly points the different approaches of Sol Gabetta and Jean-Guihen Queyras (and their respective accompanying bands); Gabetta more suave and elegant, Queyras more forceful and spirited. Queyras's *Adagio*, with the lightest of accompaniments – solo lute – is especially eloquent; Gabetta's ornamentation here is more elaborate and its effect more studied. In the finale, Queyras is more concerned to shape the fast passages and doesn't feel tempted, as Gabetta is, to slow down for the soulful moments.

Both programmes take steps to vary the unbroken sequence of cello concertos. Queyras's scheme, alternating the cello with varied sinfonias and concertos for the string band, is particularly successful, with a series of extremely lively (though on occasion excessively fierce) performances by the Akademie für Alte Musik, Georg Kallweit contributing a beautiful violin solo in the *Largo* of the well-known Concerto RV565 from *L'estro armonico*. The two short Caldara sinfonias are striking pieces and sit well alongside the Vivaldi items. Among the cello concertos I'd single out RV409, a most

original work in which a bassoon has the role of personal accompanist to the solo cello, the beautiful *Larghetto* in RV412 with a backing of sustained strings, and the energetic, highly inventive A minor Concerto, RV419.

The cello-playing Count von Schönborn provides the connecting theme for Sol Gabetta's disc; his library contains some significant Vivaldi manuscripts, including the sole source of the sonata recorded here. Of the three Vivaldi concertos, I was particularly impressed by another A minor work, RV420, with its unusual *Andante* opening. The Leo Concerto is in *galant* style and only intermittently interesting. For me its most appealing section is the elegantly pathetic *Larghetto*, which would, however, have benefited from a more flowing tempo. Platti worked at the court of Schönborn's brother in Würzburg. With its finely worked contrapuntal *tutti*s and picturesque, melancholy *Adagio*, his Concerto, in this vigorous, poised performance, proves to be a real find. **Duncan Druce**

'Made in Britain'

Bax The Happy Forest **Butterworth** English Idylls – No 1; No 2 **Delius** A Village Romeo and Juliet – The Walk to the Paradise Garden **Elgar** Salut d'amour **German** Nell Gwyn Overture **Vaughan Williams** The Lark Ascending^a. English Folk Song Suite **Walton** Scapino Overture

^aJames Clark *vn* Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson
Avie © AV2194 (73' • DDD)



Wilson back on Merseyside for an RLPO Britfest

We have already heard John Wilson as a passionate exponent of English music directing a splendid new collection of John Ireland's music, centring on the beautiful Piano Concerto (see page 61). Here he is, again with the RLPO and equally in his element, in a well-chosen programme of English orchestral miniatures very well recorded. He opens with Walton's portrait of the *commedia dell'arte* character Scapino, full of gusto yet bringing out tenderly the contrasting romantic episodes that fill out the character. Butterworth's two *English Idylls* are uniquely evocative of the English countryside, while Delius's sensuously romantic *Walk to the Paradise Garden* and Bax's lushly scored *The Happy Forest* are made glowingly radiant in John Wilson's richly textured evocations.

Elgar's more traditional, less sultry *Salut d'amour* is played here with delicacy. It is good that Edward German was not left out of the programme, for his colourful, even rumbustious *Nell Gwynn Overture* engagingly introduces 'Early one morning' as a centrepiece. Vaughan Williams's jolly *English*

Folk Song Suite was written for military band but is heard here in Gordon Jacob's exuberant orchestral transcription. Iona Brown once said that the closing *pianissimo* of *The Lark Ascending* is one of the hardest solo violin passages to bring off with a perfect blend of poetry and control. Certainly the violinist here, James Clark, does so expertly and movingly, after picturing the lark flying freely above with wonderful delicacy. **Ivan March**

'Music Makes a City'

'A Louisville Orchestra Story'

A film by Owsley Brown III and Jerome Hiler

Owsley Brown Presents © 2 DVD 811063011090 (100' • NTSC)

Special features include over two hours of interviews with composers, musicians and related personalities



On film: the rise and fall of the Louisville Orchestra

Many of us, I'm sure, still own First Edition LPs – grey sleeves with round gold labels stuck on the front – with the Louisville Orchestra. In all, they featured over 120 original commissions and 400 world premieres.

This feature-length (100 mins) documentary tells the story behind the orchestra and how it became the nation's centre for new music in the 1950s. It is not, frankly, a page-turner but an interesting tale that unfolds at a leisurely pace. Written by co-director Jerome Hiler and voiced by Louisvillian singer-songwriter Will Oldham, it concentrates on the orchestra's golden era under its founding conductor Robert Whitney (a Tanglewood classmate of Leonard Bernstein) who was music director from 1937 to 1967, and Louisville's visionary music-loving mayor Charles Farnsley. This remarkable man believed in the Confucian ideal that high culture attracts wealth and power. The orchestra was his chosen instrument to achieve this – and it worked. Instead of paying star soloists vast fees, he set about commissioning the leading composers of the day, helped by a grant of \$400,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Everyone from Milhaud and the 'Boulangerie' to Foss and Carter (both on camera along with Harold Shapero, Chou Wen-Chung, Norman Dello Joio and many others) obliged. Their music provides an almost continuous soundtrack, with some lengthier excerpts illustrated by sensitively edited footage of the Ohio River. The film, co-directed by Owsley Brown III, is elegantly put together and handsomely presented. Sadly the story does not have a happy ending: as I write, the orchestra, which filed for bankruptcy last year, has had to cancel its entire autumn season. The musicians are on strike. **Jeremy Nicholas**



Guy Rickards reviews Lavista's complete quartets:

'The performances are exemplary, a tribute to the Cuarteto Latinamericano's fine musicianship' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



David Vickers reviews Purcell's Trio Sonatas:

'The Retrospect Trio achieves rich sonorities when Purcell springs extraordinary harmonic surprises' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

Casals

String Quartet^a. Violin Sonata^b

^bJosep Colomé *vn* ^bKatia Michel *pf* ^aAlart Quartet
KlassicCat © KC1010 (52' • DDD)



Casals the composer explored by Spanish musicians and label

Casals's String Quartet is the work of a 15-year-old debutant in 1893 and it sounds no more or less than that. Its three completed movements (a finale was apparently left unfinished) pay respectful homage to Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven respectively. There is something rather quaint about such an impeccably behaved piece being recorded by musicians whose photo image is so dark and moody. But full credit to the Alart Quartet for devoting themselves to the cause, even if they might have given the rather unrelieved textures a bit more help in the direction of transparency.

The Violin Sonata of 1945 is musically a good deal more resourceful. The picture-postcard Iberianisms of the central *Scherzo* are something to savour and the concluding slow movement – sympathetically played – rings true emotionally in its retreat into Rachmaninovian nostalgia.

Evidently Casals felt a need to keep this side of his musicianship alive, and, whatever his music's intrinsic merits, this nicely recorded disc has an undeniable documentary value.

David Fanning

Chopin • Mendelssohn

Chopin Cello Sonata, Op 65. Three Waltzes, Op 64 (arr Davydov) Mendelssohn Cello Sonata No 2, Op 58. Song Without Words, Op 109

Pieter Wispelwey *vc* Paolo Giacometti *pf*
Onyx © ONYX4078 (68' • DDD)



Two of the great early Romantic cello sonatas

The Dutch cellist Pieter Wispelwey, invariably an inspired artist, here couples two of the greatest cello sonatas from the early Romantic period, both written in the 1840s. Much the stronger and more original of the two is the Mendelssohn, with its first

movement as exhilarating as the comparable first movement of the *Italian* Symphony. That Paolo Giacometti has opted for a twangy fortepiano of the period may not add to the beauty of the performance but it makes for a better balance between the instruments than if a modern Steinway was used. It also allows for the pianist to articulate perfectly in really fast speeds.

The clarity and precision are also remarkable, whether in that first movement, the *Allegretto* second movement with its crisp *pizzicatos*, the lovely slow movement with spread chords accompanying the cello's melody, or the busy, chattering finale. The Op 109 *Song Without Words* makes an attractive extra item.

The remarkable thing about the Chopin in this context is how like Mendelssohn it sounds, despite its piano flourishes, typical of the composer. The cross-rhythms in the second-movement *Scherzo* again sound like Mendelssohn, though the slow movement is less distinctive, leading to the dashing compound time of the finale. The three waltzes which come as a makeweight were all arranged by the cellist Karl Davydov, who studied with Mendelssohn, and they are among the most popular, starting with the so-called 'Minute' Waltz and continuing with the C sharp minor and the A flat, all played at breakneck speed – no doubt the intention of the virtuoso cellist Davydov. The sound is clear and well-balanced.

Edward Greenfield

Fauré

'Complete Chamber Music for Strings and Piano' Andante, Op 75^{ae}. Berceuse, Op 16^{ae}. Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 109^{ce}; No 2, Op 117^{cf}. Elégie, Op 24^{ce}. Morceau de lecture^{ae}. Morceau de lecture^{cd}. Piano Quartets – No 1, Op 15^{abce}; No 2, Op 45^{abcf}. Piano Quintets – No 1, Op 89^{eg}; No 2, Op 115^{fg}. Piano Trio, Op 120^{acf}. Pièce (Papillon), Op 77^{ce}. Romance, Op 28^{ae}. Romance, Op 69^{ce}. Sérénade, Op 98^{ce}. Sicilienne, Op 78^{ce}. String Quartet, Op 121^g. Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 13^{ae}; No 2, Op 108^{af}.

^aRenaud Capuçon *vn* ^bGérard Caussé *va* ^cGautier Capuçon, ^dRaphaël Meriin *vc* ^eMichael Dalberto, ^fNicholas Angelich *pf* ^gQuatuor Ebène
Virgin Classics © 070875-2 (5h 12' • DDD)



All Fauré's works for strings and piano in one album

This is a smartly packaged box and an enterprising release, bringing together the complete works of Fauré for strings and piano played by a classy roster of artists. Though the discs are arranged by genre, an alternative (and revealing) route is to journey with Fauré through his life, opus by opus, beginning with the First Violin Sonata and the First Piano Quartet. These find Fauré at his most open-hearted and the exuberant playing conveys this well. But immediately you're aware of a problem: the boomy, unbeautiful sound quality. To what extent this affected my perception of the performances themselves is difficult to tell. In the Violin Sonata No 1, for instance, Renaud Capuçon seems slightly exaggerated in his gestures, far less subtle than Isabelle Faust, whose finely spun lines are a delight in both this (never more so than in the *Allegro vivo* third movement) and the Second Sonata. In the Piano Quartet No 1, too, there's more emoting from the Capuçon/Caussé/Dalberto line-up than in Domus's poised account or the wonderfully warm Beaux Arts reading (the slow movement is a highlight). I can't help feeling that part of this sensation comes from the recording quality, which is consistent across the two separate sets of sessions; the exception is the String Quartet, recorded by Quatuor Ebène at a different venue in 2008, and a reminder that it boasts one of the finest viola players around today in Mathieu Herzog, in a reading that finds them very much at home in this ravishing piece, leading the listener unerringly through Fauré's interiorised universe.

One of the other results of this acoustic is that it seems to play up the percussive qualities of the piano (for I would hardly count Angelich or Dalberto aggressive pianists). In the cello sonatas, certainly Devoyon for Isserlis and Stott for Poltéra both exhibit greater restraint in the edgy first movement of the Cello Sonata No 1. Most convincing on the new set is the finale of this piece, where Gautier Capuçon's tone can really soar. Received wisdom suggests

that Fauré's music becomes more challenging as you move along the timeline – something attributed to what Roger Nichols so eloquently describes as 'the many moments of "harmonic drift" so typical of late Fauré'. It's that sense of a lack of musical signposts that can initially disorientate, which makes the responsibility of the performer all the greater. But actually what is striking about this particular journey through the chamber music is the warmth and easefulness of his final works – a luxuriance of melodic invention – that suffuses the Piano Trio, the slow movement of the Second Cello Sonata, even moments in the String Quartet, albeit of a most inward rapture. The reading of the Trio by the Capuçon brothers with Angelich is one of the best things here: fervent, joyous and weaving an aural coat of many colours in the *Andantino*.

Along the way there are also the smaller gems: the Berceuse for violin; the cello's famous *Elégie* and the *Pièce* often known as 'Papillon' (at his publisher's insistence and much to the composer's annoyance: 'Butterfly or Dung Fly, call it what you like' was Fauré's irritated response). These are unfailingly beautifully conveyed.

If you can get over the sound issues, then there's much fine playing here; how frustrating, then, that this hampers what should have been a benchmark in modern Fauré performance. **Harriet Smith**

Vn Sons – selected comparison:

Faust, Boffard (10/02) (HARM) HMA195 1741*

Vc Sons – selected comparisons:

Isserlis, Devoyon (8/95) (RCA) 09026 68049-2

Poltéra, Stott (3/08) (CHAN) CHAN10447

Pf Qts – selected comparison:

Domus (10/85) (HYPE) CDA66166*

Pf Qt No 1, Pf Trio – selected comparison:

Beaux Arts Trio, Kasbkashian (6/90) (PHIL) 422 350-2PH

Haydn

String Quartets, Op 71

Takács Quartet

Hyperion © CDA67793 (58' • DDD)

Haydn

String Quartets, Op 74

Takács Quartet

Hyperion © CDA67781 (64' • DDD)



The Takács in two volumes of Haydn's striking London-conceived quartets Big works, and written to be premiered in the Hanover Square Rooms during Haydn's second London visit in 1794. Thus Op 71 No 1 begins with a public summons, four loud chords on the tonic, subdominant and dominant of B flat. Unusually, the first violin

Katia Michel: exploring
Casals the composer



is directed to play *fortissimo*, the others *forte*. The Takács Quartet, if not entirely forceful, observe the difference in grading. Oddly, they aren't as careful about the opening theme that follows, playing it with a full tone that's hardly *mezza voce*. Contrast is diminished, as it is throughout this movement because their restricted dynamic range scales down drama. It isn't until the finale that commitment to the work is noticeable; and then it all gets better.

If the slow movement of No 1 is impersonal, that of No 2 is anything but, the melody, ideally paced, rising out of a hushed *cantabile* and building up to a sonorous C major middle section. As touching is the interpretation of the *Andante con moto* of No 3, particularly revealing in the shadings from B flat minor to D flat major in the first variation. What about extroversion, though? Pertinently, Professor Mary Hunter says that 'virtuosic or "brilliant" passages may reveal that the composer has clearly constructed a moment in which the audience's attention is meant to be directed to the performer's capacity to reproduce the difficult passagework he has written'. The outer movements of Op 74 No 1, with sweeping passagework and virtuoso writing for the leader in the first, show that Haydn had clearly constructed all his moments, and the Takács don't stint on them. Or on the

moments that are less obvious calls to attention – like No 2 which, after an imposing eight-bar introduction, settles into what these musicians discern as a work of quieter subtleties, their excellent internal balancing allowing every note and expressive gesture to speak. As for the *Largo assai* of No 3, it's for you to experience what a wholeheartedly unfeigned performance can do. The sound is realistic; but is it realistic to seat the players right across the stage?

Nalen Anthoni

Lavista

String Quartets – No 1, 'Diacronía'; No 2, 'Reflejos de la noche'; No 3, 'Música para mi vecino'; No 4, 'Sinfonías'; No 5, 'Siete invenciones'; No 6, 'Suite en cinco partes'

Cuarteto Latinoamericano

Toccata Classics © TOCCO106 (75' • DDD)



The first complete recording of quartets by a Mexican master Mario Lavista (b1943) is perhaps an unlikely string quartet composer: a sonic pioneer, experimenting with instrumental, orchestral and electroacoustic media as well as being a distinguished writer, teacher and lecturer. His First Quartet, *Diacronía* (1969), was not numbered as such originally, and in the heady days of 1960s experimentation one doubts

Lavista saw it as the first of a series. The shortest, its single movement is a study in sonority where pitches are exact but rhythm and tempo are imprecise. *Reflejos de la noche* followed much later (1984), expanding on some of *Diacronía*'s concerns in a more expressively varied musical landscape. Both it and *Música para mi vecino* ('Music for my neighbour', 1995) arose from his burgeoning relationship with the members of the Cuarteto Latinoamericano, although the latter was commissioned for the Kronos. This Third Quartet explores the milieu of Machaut and Josquin in a beguilingly restrained, abstract fashion, while the Fourth, *Sinfonías* (1996), turned to even earlier musical forms for a rather moving essay based on quotations from his own works, including *Reflejos de la noche*. The impetus came from one Mrs Niles Sears for a work to accompany her soul to the afterlife. The Fifth, *Siete invenciones* (1998), explores this terrain further while the Sixth, *Suite en cinco partes* (1999), makes hay with canon and isorhythm.

The performances are exemplary, a tribute to the Cuarteto Latinoamericano's fine musicianship and willingness to explore very different terrain to that for which they are best known on disc, the 17 quartets by Villa-Lobos. Lavista's series may not be the greatest quartet cycle of the 20th century but it is an intriguing and thought-provoking one, and is given here in excellent performances, superbly transferred. Toccata Classics' presentation is top-rate. Recommended.

Guy Rickards

Mendelssohn

Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 45; No 2, Op 58.

Song Without Words, Op 109.

Variations concertantes, Op 17

Paul Watkins *vs* Huw Watkins *pf*

Chandos © CHAN10701 (63' • DDD)



The Watkins brothers united for Mendelssohn

Both of Mendelssohn's splendidly assured cello sonatas and the *Variations concertantes* were composed for his brother Paul to play, and the engaging Variations were dedicated to him. So the brotherly team of Paul and Huw Watkins, each a distinguished musician in his own right, makes an ideal partnership for these attractive works.

The Variations, written when the composer was only a precocious 19, show him in characteristically appealing melodic style. The *Song Without Words* is the only work in this format (which Mendelssohn again made his own) and has an impetuous middle section to give the cellist a chance for momentary virtuosity. The two sonatas lie somewhere between Beethoven and Brahms but still

have Mendelssohn's own stamp of fresh individuality. The First Sonata is notable for its characteristic central *Andante*, essentially an intermezzo with a touch of wistfulness, while the finale, which recalls the flavour of the opening movement, is all but a rondo which gains in eloquence and ends peacefully. The Second Sonata (written five years later, in 1843) in the bustle of its opening *Allegro assai vivace* immediately evokes the vigour of the *Italian* Symphony. The *Allegro scherzando* which follows is crisply rhythmic, while the *Adagio* brings a deeply expressive chorale main theme. The work then ends in exultant abandon.

There have been plenty of recommendable recordings of this music (including fine bargain versions by Richard Lester with Susan Tones and Maria Kliegel with Kristin Merscher, each well worth its modest cost) but this finely balanced and recorded Chandos CD now stands high on the list of recommendations.

Ivan March

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Lester, Tones (5/89*) (HYPE) CDH55064

Kliegel, Merscher (7/94) (NAXO) 8 550655

Piazzolla

Las cuatro estaciones Porteñas^b. La muerte del ángel^b. Oblivion^b. Chau Paris^a. Río Sena^a. Windy^a. Adiós Nonino^a. Reunión cumbre^a. Revolucionario^b. Resurrección del ángel^a. Libertango^a. Escualo^a. Chiquilín de Bachín^a. Zum^a (arr Q Grant, J Bragato) Macquarie Trio ABC Classics Discovery © ABC476 4317 (77' • DDD)



Piazzolla pared-down in piano trio treatments

Ubiquitous as Piazzolla's music may have become, its presentation constantly evolves, from his original or officially sanctioned instrumentations for bandoneón-led ensembles or orchestra to a variety of alternatives: piano solo, piano and strings/chamber orchestra, string quartet, guitar duo. Now here comes one for piano trio in arrangements by José Bragato or Quentin Grant and played with fervour by the Macquarie Trio (the fine trio-in-residence at Macquarie University in Australia), whose previous recordings include the complete Brahms, Dvořák and Schubert trios.

The sharp lines of the piano trio medium suit Piazzolla's music as well as any and better than most. In more elegiac or nostalgic items like *Adiós Nonino* and *Oblivion*, indeed, the textural severity keeps the emotion nicely balanced, avoiding over-sentimentality, while in fleeter numbers (or sections thereof) such as *La muerte del ángel*, *Revolucionario* or *Libertango* the interplay of the piano and the two solo strings keeps the lines crisp. Only in the suite *Las cuatro estaciones Porteñas* ('The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires') is

there any sense of the music and medium being at odds, due to the Macquarie's rather driven performance.

There are a good number of less familiar items in the programme, such as the two Parisian pieces from 1955, *Chau Paris* and *Río Sena* ('River Seine') – somewhat ordinary salon pieces to be truthful – *Windy* (1977) and *Escualo* ('Shark', 1978). Here and there one misses the atmosphere of the originals, as in *Reunión cumbre* ('Summit Meeting'), written for Piazzolla to record with the saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, but on the whole this a remarkably successful album, a tribute to the strength and versatility of Piazzolla's genius. Good sound, too, from 2002-03, the venue the Eugene Goossens Hall in Sydney's Ultimo Centre.

Guy Rickards

Platti

Six Sonatas for Cello and Basso continuo

Sebastian Hess *vc* Axel Wolf *lute/theo*

Oehms Classics © OC794 (60' • DDD)



Rare music from Würzburg reveals an effortless melodic gift

The six sonatas on this recording are a real rarity. Platti, whose father played in the orchestra of St Mark's Basilica in Venice, spent most of his life at the court of the Schönborn prince-archbishops in Würzburg as a sort of musical general practitioner; in addition to playing a number of string instruments, he also sang and played the oboe, flute and harpsichord. And if that were not enough, he also composed in a wide variety of styles and genres including *a cappella* Masses, an opera based on the Arianna story and a number of oratorios.

In the end though, it is instrumental music that lies at the heart of his output, most of which still remains in manuscript in Würzburg. Although some of it was presumably written for Platti himself to perform, the many works for solo cello that he composed undoubtedly reflect the passionate enthusiasm for the instrument of one of the Schönborn princes. The sonatas for cello and basso continuo (the latter here imaginatively and sensitively realised on lute and theorbo by Axel Wolf) show Platti to have been a more interesting composer than might be thought. All six are conventional enough in their adherence to a four-movement slow-fast-slow-fast structure, but the real surprise comes in Platti's seemingly effortless and endless melodic invention. They are given here by Sebastian Hess in elegant and beautifully shaped performances which range from steely virtuosity in the fast passagework to warm-toned lyricism in the slow movements. Fine advocacy for some hidden gems. **Iain Fenlon**

Purcell

Twelve Sonatas in Three Parts, Z790-801

Retrospect Trio

Linn ⑤ CKD374 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Delightful performances that revel in Purcell's rich harmonies

Purcell published his collection of a dozen trio sonatas in 1683, and in the preface remarked that he 'faithfully endeavour'd a just imitation of the most fam'd Italian Masters'. In his booklet-note Matthew Halls observes that the famed Italians who influenced these sonatas were probably Corelli and obscure figures such as Colista, Cazzati, Vitali, Bassani, Bertali and Matteis, but also explains how Purcell incorporated French elements and his own Englishness into proceedings. Purcell declared that he attempted 'to bring the seriousness and gravity of that Sort of Musick into vogue' and hoped that 'his labours will Seem neither unpleasant, nor unprofitable'. It is thus fitting that the Retrospect Trio (ie quartet) plays with ample seriousness, gravity, pleasantness and, hopefully, profit.

As with their previous volume of Purcell sonatas (9/09), the first and second violin duties are shared democratically between Sophie Gent and Matthew Truscott; they engage in fluent dialogues with Jonathan Manson's conversational bass viol, and Halls's keyboard continuo realisations are flawlessly nimble and subtle. Whether Purcell's brief movements are slow (the rapturous opening of No 6), quick (the fleeting *Allegro* that concludes No 2) or moderate (the dance-like *Poco largo* of No 12), these performances convey rhetorical suggestions of speaking intimately, unforced breathing, and listening attentively. The Retrospect Trio achieves rich sonorities when Purcell springs extraordinary harmonic surprises, such as the dizzying chromatic sequence in the *Adagio* of No 3 and melancholic C minor passages throughout No 9. These delightful endeavours should win plenty of friends. **David Vickers**

R Strauss

Piano Quartet, Op 13^a. Cello Sonata, Op 6^b.

Capriccio - Introduction^c

^aPražák Quartet; ^bPetr Holman vs ^bMichal Kaňka,

^cVladimír Fortin vs ^{ab}Miguel Borges Coelho pf

Praga Digitals ⑤ PRD/DSD250 275

(75' • DDD/DSD)



Two of the young Richard Strauss's chamber works

Strauss's Piano Quartet in C minor is not among his more celebrated early works, even though it won first prize in a competition organised by the Berlin Tonkünstlerverein. Written in 1884-85, it is derivative in its

classical style, although it is underpinned by a strong Romantic flair, immediately obvious in the Brahmsian first movement. Miguel Borges Coelho and the members of the Pražák Quartet play it with gusto and are especially persuasive in the witty *scherzo* with its almost dreamy lyrical central section. The *Andante* too is endearingly melodic, with a touch of Mendelssohn in its shaping, although with more full-bodied scoring. The vigorous finale completes the work confidently and impressively, and the performers here revel in its dynamism. In short, they make a very good case for its return to the repertoire.

Michal Kaňka and Miguel Borges Coelho, similarly, give a highly persuasive account of the Cello Sonata, lyrically passionate in the generously themed first movement, gently expressive in the rather melancholy *Andante*, contrastingly skittish and imaginatively diverse in the finale, with an attractive lyrical strain, again revealing the work as well worth restoring to the recital room. The later and much better-known introduction to the opera *Capriccio* makes a generous bonus, beautifully played by a different grouping of equal excellence, and here the admirably clear recording, made in the Martinů Hall of Lichtenstein Palace, Prague, has a subtle added lustre from the SACD recording.

Ivan March

'Five Pieces'

Hindemith Violin Sonata in E Janáček Violin

Sonata Silvestrov Five Pieces Takemitsu

Distance de fée

Duo Gazzana

ECM New Series ⑤ 476 4428 (47' • DDD)



Lauded sibling duo from Italy debuts on ECM

Graduates in visual arts and literature respectively, Natascia and Raffaella Gazzana convey no mean musical chemistry in a recital that has evidently been conceived as an overall unity. Certainly the modally inflected harmony and the taciturn interplay of Takemitsu's *Distance de fée* (1951) suggest a reaching out for 'what lies beyond' that was never to leave the ruminative and impressionistic language of his maturity, while Hindemith looks back less in anger than regret to an overtly Classical stability in his Violin Sonata (1935) – the flowing anxiety of its first movement contrasting with the purposeful alternation of 'song' and 'dance' in its successor. A fusion such as Janáček's Violin Sonata (1921) pointedly rejects as it moves from a fractured sonata *allegro*, via an impassioned *Ballada* and an impetuous *scherzo*, to an *Adagio* in which the stark dissociation of violin and piano is absolute – not least in a

reading which mirrors that of the work in being the sure highlight of this disc.

After which the wistful melancholy of Silvestrov's Five Pieces (2004) feels the more remote, for all that these players have underlined the subtle differences in mood and pace that give these miniatures a focus (even more relevant in the 70-minute *Melodies of the Moments* from which they are taken). A recital that makes absolute sense on its own terms (for all that Paul Griffiths's note ties itself in knots explaining why), though an additional work – Enescu's *Impressions d'enfance*, maybe – might further have enhanced this already auspicious debut. **Richard Whitehouse**

'Harmonic Labyrinth'

CPE Bach Variations on Folies d'Espagne, H263^b

JS Bach Solo Cello Suite No 3, BWV1009^a. Viola da

gamba Sonata No 3, BWV1029^{ab} Hindemith Solo

Cello Sonata, Op 25 No 3^a Locatelli Caprice No 3,

'Il labirinto armonico', Op 3 (arr Saram)^b P de Silva

Sonatina - Pas de deux. Study for the Left Hand.

Alankara-Tala. Prelude^b

^aRohan de Saram vs ^bPreethi de Silva hpd

First Hand Records ⑤ FHR11 (72' • DDD)



Sri Lankan partnership explore Bach legacy

This recital disc will come as a puzzle to collectors. Prompted by a concert Rohan de Saram and Preethi de Silva gave in Los Angeles last year, it is an eclectic assemblage of music that nevertheless reveals much about the artists, both Sri Lankan by birth.

The contributions from each of the musicians reflect some of the major influences on their careers. Saram was a pupil of Casals, so Bach is very important to him, and his approach to the music reflects that. It is, however, as an interpreter of modern music that he has made a successful career. Hence, while his performance of Bach's Third Solo Cello Suite, and even that of his misguided Locatelli transcription, harks back to those of his youth, his masterful performance of the Hindemith Sonata for solo cello immediately impresses by its freshness. Silva's training as a harpsichordist and composer in Europe and the US is amply on show in the sophisticated and witty CPE Bach Variations on the *Folies d'Espagne*, and in four of her own well-crafted works for harpsichord dating from the late 1960s and early 1970s, only one of which takes specific inspiration from South Asian music.

The two musicians perform together in just one item, JS Bach's Third Sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord, a work often played by cellists. While their performance is pleasing enough, the recording gives too much prominence to the cello part, which is only one part among three in this work.

Julie Anne Sadle



Jeremy Nicholas reviews a feast of Eileen Joyce:

'This is such a cornucopia of good things it is hard to know where to start, what to mention, what to omit' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



Stephen Plaistow reviews Aimard's homage to Liszt:

'...and while I am being grouchy, I've heard better Steinways and better recordings of them' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 20, Op 4 No 2; No 21, 'Waldstein', Op 53; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; no 28, Op 101; No 30, Op 109

Walter Gieseking *pif*

Naxos Historical © 8 112063 (79' • ADD)

Recorded 1938-40



Gieseking in staple Beethoven sonatas

Walter Gieseking was hardly the most consistent of great pianists but at his finest, as on this present issue of recordings dating from 1938-40, he offers playing of an astonishing fleetness and patrician beauty. Others – Claudio Arrau, for example – may have queried an approach to Beethoven where aristocratic understatement, backed by a phenomenal aural sensitivity and dexterity, replaces a more heaven-storming, robust rhetoric ('his sound was not right in Beethoven'), yet Gieseking creates his own distinctive ambience and, like a river in full spate, sweeps all before him. Here with a vengeance are reminders that pianists of a past generation invariably chose tempi faster than their successors; a quality dictated by musical taste but also by the lighter instruments of the day.

The *Waldstein* Sonata's first movement is *presto* rather than *allegro con brio* in a performance of an extraordinary feline virtuosity. Others may roar their passions to the heavens and achieve a darker drama and heft in the *Appassionata* but Gieseking once again creates his own entirely personal sense of menace and power. Such playing, like being at the centre of a vortex and by the pianist's own admission, had little to do with hours spent in the practice room but rather with an innate musical and technical talent and perception. Again, in Opp 101 and 109 there is no sense of special pleading or underlining but rather a pace and urgency that always suggest 'time's winged chariot hurrying near'. All lovers of an entirely individual pianistic genius will have to take this and, once again, Ward Marston's restoration is exemplary.

Bryce Morrison

Bernstein • Gershwin

Bernstein *West Side Story* (arr Kostal)^a – Prologue; Jet Song; Something's Coming; Rock Blues; Mambo; Cha Cha; Maria; America; Cool; I feel pretty; One hand, one heart; Tonight; Somewhere; A boy like that; I have a love; The Rumble; Finale
Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue*

Katia & Marielle Labèque *pfs* with ^aGonzalo Grau *perc*

^aRaphäel Séguinier *drums* ^aPablo Bencid *timbales*

KML Recordings © KML1121 (58' • DDD)



The Labèques in Bernstein- requested arrangements

Irwin Kostal, who wrote the original orchestration of *West Side Story*, made this arrangement of the musical's show-stopping songs and instrumental pieces specifically for the Labèque sisters (with added percussion), and Leonard Bernstein told him to.

Which lands me in a critical quandary. It doesn't get more authentic than that, so why does this treatment feel functional and diluted? It can't be because there are no voices; Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* carries the melodic invention and harmonic resourcefulness of the score without its lyrics. Could it be because we're lacking the vibrancy of an orchestral concept that can persuade us we are in 1950s New York but also in a 19th-century opera, as 'Cool' slips into 'A boy like that'? I don't think so – jazz-based reworkings by Dave Brubeck, Oscar Peterson and André Previn demonstrate that it is possible to riff off *West Side Story*'s soul, without words or orchestration.

And therein lies the problem – anaemic soullessness. A backdrop of Manhattan city noise and coy whistling gets the Prologue off to a contrived start. Bernstein's motivic leapfrogging actually works pretty well on two pianos; what a pity the pitched drums thud like furniture being moved. Then the problems snowball. The 'Jet Song' is reimagined as a Meade Lux Lewis boogie-woogie number but the Labèques have learnt rather than feel the idiom, and it sounds like a parody. The 'Dance at the Gym' sequence is a potpourri of contrived endings and transitions. Irritating liberties have been taken with the structure of 'Cool', and

Raphäel Séguinier's drum fills don't so much swing as creak.

As 'The Rumble' segues into the Finale, the Labèques crank up the sentimentality shamelessly. And their *Rhapsody in Blue* is similarly cosmetically pretty. You can play the notes brilliantly but still get the music wrong.

Philip Clark

G Böhm

Auf meinen lieben Gott. Christe, der du bist Tag und Licht. Christ lag in Todesbanden (two versions). Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist. Three Preludes and Fugues. Vater unser im Himmelreich (two versions). Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her. Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten (Partita)

Bernard Foccroulle *org*

Ricercar © RIC319 (70' • DDD)

Played on the Van Hagerbeer organ of Grote Sint Laurenskerk, Alkmaar, Netherlands



A portrait of Bach's teacher and early influence

For those who revere JS Bach's music, especially his organ works, an understanding of its antecedents is essential. Although his pilgrimage to hear Buxtehude in Lübeck is well documented, one should not overlook the importance of Bach's earlier, teenage studies in Lüneberg with the organist Georg Böhm (1661-1733). CPE Bach, writing to Forkel in 1775, claimed his father loved Böhm's music. Evidence of a close association emerged in 2006 with the discovery of the earliest known Bach autographs, one of which is a copy of Reincken's chorale fantasia *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* signed 'Il Fine â Dom Georg: Böhme descriptum ao 1700 Lunaburgi'. Later, in 1727, Bach named Böhm as his northern agent for the sale of the second and third keyboard Partitas.

Böhm's reputation rests squarely on his development of the chorale partita into a sophisticated variation form, models of which are included here and clearly influenced Bach. The same applies to the hefty and free-flowing Praeludium in C which opens this disc. However, its sheer solidity becomes a little wearying at times. The main criticism to be levelled at Böhm's music is, sadly, that it



Bernard Foccroulle
concentrates on Böhm

lacks flair, with few audaciously hair-raising harmonic moments to prick up one's ears.

However, Bernard Foccroulle does his very best to put over this sturdy music with plenty of refreshing choices of registration, especially in the partita on *Auf meinen lieben Gott*. The recorded balance of the Van Hagerbeer organ in the church of St Laurence in Alkmaar is revealingly close.

Malcolm Riley

L Couperin

'Pièces de clavecin'

Complete Works for Harpsichord

Richard Egarr *hpd*

Harmonia Mundi © ④ HMU90 7511/14 (5h • DDD)



Egarr records the Couperin
he believes in most

'I would argue that he was the greatest of the Couperins', writes harpsichordist Richard Egarr of Louis (c1626-1661), the uncle of François 'le grand'. It's a bold statement and, by investing his intellectual and artistic energies in a four-disc survey of Louis Couperin's harpsichord works, Egarr is backing it up with an impressive display of imaginative interpretation. On the page, Couperin's harpsichord works often look closer to the severe drama of Froberger than the endless wit, variation and elegance of François. But Egarr's playing yields compelling variety and prismatic

possibilities in the preludes, dance movements and majestic chaconnes, organised by the performer into his own well-balanced suites.

On recordings Egarr isn't immediately associated with this repertoire, rather with Purcell, Bach, Handel and Mozart. And it doesn't always feel like it's his natural territory. Ornamentation tends to be taut rather than pliant and its expressive power is kept within clearly delineated bounds. Compare Egarr's reading of the famous 'Tombeau de M Blancrocher' with Christophe Rousset's 2010 recording on a two-disc set of Louis Couperin's music (*Aparté*) and you hear a more formal and contained account. Rousset is a risk-taker and in the end far more dramatic and expressive. Much of the drama in this music comes after the note is played, with the decay and the play of overtones giving it a haunting inwardness. By letting the instrument ring, investing in the silences and slowing the pace down, Rousset harks back to the music's origins in the lute repertoire, which yields a stronger, more private account of this deeply mournful piece.

Egarr's strength emerges where one wants simplicity, where the music needs to unfold directly and without too much interpretative intrusion. Even in sharply rhythmic dances, such as the 'Branle de Basque' in F major, he produces an aristocratic smoothness that is arguably better suited to the composer than

the sharp snaps and rhythmic punch of other interpreters. In the preludes, Egarr knits together the music into a close, composed weave, rather than something seemingly improvised and fitfully delivered.

Two instruments are used, both modern. One is based on a Flemish Ruckers from 1638 and the other on a slightly later French instrument. The tuning, which Egarr likens to sharp cheese – 'more roquefort than brie' – is decidedly pungent. Too much so for my taste, but it does add a dramatic snarl to the sound.

Quibbles aside, there are two compelling reasons to own this set: it is endlessly entertaining and vibrant music; and, with the exception of a handful of movements not available to the player, it is presented complete. Louis Couperin deserves the honour of a new, meticulously performed and recorded complete edition, and lovers of the harpsichord repertoire shouldn't be without one.

Philip Kennicott

Selected comparison:

Rousset (*APAR*) AP006

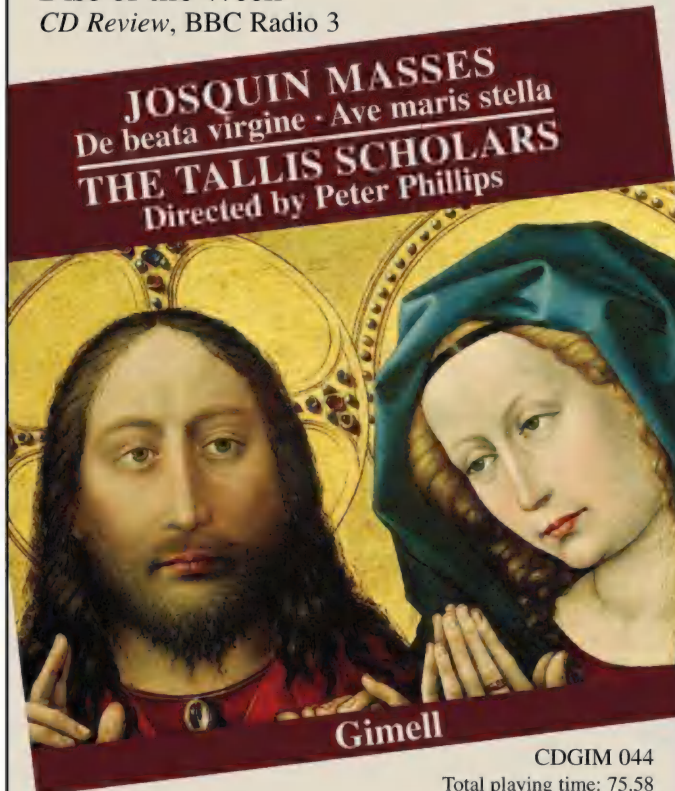
Debussy

'Piano Music, Vol 5'

Masques. Nocturne. Elégie. Petite suite^a. Marche écossaise^a. Epigraphes antiques^a. En blanc et noir^a. Lindaraja^a

Pascal Rogé *pf* with ^aAmi Rogé *pf*
Onyx © ONYX4059 (70 • DDD)

Disc of the Week
CD Review, BBC Radio 3



Gimell

CDGIM 044

Total playing time: 75.58

Available on CD and Download

Josquin des Prés

Missa De beata virgine

Missa Ave maris stella · Credo quarti toni

Compelling accounts of two Masses by Josquin that seem opposed in terms of complexity and innovation yet united in artistry and craftsmanship. The Tallis Scholars achieve an extraordinary clarity of diction, line and texture. Robert Levett, International Record Review

In the fifth release in their Josquin cycle, The Tallis Scholars reach the Missa De beata virgine – probably a late work, widely performed in the composer's life time and surviving in an astonishing 69 sources – and the earlier, more serene Ave maris stella.

Both, though stylistically contrasting, use chant melody with elaborate canons and mathematical schemes. This exceptional ensemble makes it sound effortless, with impeccable tuning and evenness of tone.

Fiona Maddocks, The Observer

The Kyrie from the *Missa De beata virgine* is available to **download free of charge** from the Gimell website as an MP3 file and in a variety of lossless formats in both Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound. Use the Gimell Download Manager to automatically add your Download to iTunes.

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Volume 5 of Rogé's Debussy traversal

With this fifth volume of his Debussy survey, Pascal Rogé reaches the rarities and the music for four hands at one or two pianos. He places the solo pieces first, offering a sympathetic reading of the 1892 *Nocturne* and late *Elégie* (from 1915, the same year as the miraculous *Etudes*, though a mere musical whisper alongside them). His *Masques* reminds us of a piece surprisingly rarely played, though Bavouzet arguably brings still more character to it (and more colour in the *Nocturne*).

Rogé is joined by his wife, Ami, for the remaining works. The *Petite suite* occupies the same world as Fauré's slightly later *Dolly*, remaining firmly in the salon in this charming performance. The luxuriant strangeness of *Epigraphes antiques*, reworked for piano four hands in 1914 from earlier pieces, could have been played up to keener effect in some areas, while *Lindaraja* needs in places a surer rhythmic profile.

The masterpiece here is *En blanc et noir*, Debussy's very personal reaction to the killing fields of the First World War. The Rogés revel in its many nuances and the glistening sonorities of the textures – something fatally missing in the charmless vision of Ashkenazy father and son. But it's possible to find more darkness, more starkness in the work's centre and a greater sense of desperation in the final *Scherzando* – surely as emotionally ambiguous as Ravel's *La valse* – not least in the early Argerich reading with Kovacevich, still overpowering in its impact.

Harriet Smith

Nocturne, Elégie – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (7/08) (CHAN) CHAN10467

Masques – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (1/08) (CHAN) CHAN10443

En blanc et noir – selected comparisons:

V & V Ashkenazy (2/10) (DECC) 478 1090DH

Argerich, Kovacevich (8/78) (DECC) 478 2467DOR

Giuliani

'Varie idee sentimentali'

Rossiniana No 4, Op 22. Sonatina, Op 71 No 2.

Le Giulianate, Op 148. Variations on 'Ruhm und Liebe', Op 105. Sonata eroica, Op 150

Eduardo Fernández gtr

Oehms Classics © OC401 (71' • DDD)



Fernández tunes his modern instrument down for Giuliani

Veteran Uruguayan guitarist Eduardo Fernández is no stranger to period instruments, yet for his latest disc featuring the music of the great Italian guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani (1781–1829) he opts for a modern classical guitar. Nevertheless, the

tuning has been lowered to correspond more closely to the pitch and string tension of the guitars of Giuliani's time. And Fernández's interpretations, while making full use of the resources of a modern nylon-string instrument, are historically informed throughout – this is especially noticeable in the left-hand articulation. The result is a wholly satisfying recital that compares more than favourably with those guitar recitals by period-instrument specialists such as William Carter and Izhar Elias, the latter of whom performs Giuliani's music on an 1812 Guadagnini.

Giuliani wrote not only for himself but also for the lucrative amateur market in Vienna, where he made his home from 1806 to 1819. Hence the varying levels of difficulty and inspiration found in his solo guitar music, as well as the thorough mastery of the Viennese musical idiom of the time. From the *Rossiniana* No 4, an overture of sorts to the disc and featuring elaborations of themes from Rossini operas such as *La gazza ladra* and *Mosè in Egitto*, to the substantial one-movement *Sonata eroica*, with which the disc ends, Fernández delights in the simplicity and virtuosity alike of Giuliani's music while bringing a vast dynamic and tonal palette to bear on its more subtle aspects such as those delicate colorations in the charming miniatures which comprise *Le Giulianate*. Outstanding.

William Yeoman

Haydn

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas – HobXVI/14; HobXVI/20;

HobXVI/27; HobXVI/45

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet pf

Chandos © CHAN10689 (75' • DDD)



Volume 3 of Bavouzet's 'postcard' Haydn series

If, like me, you have been badly missing Alfred Brendel in Haydn since his retirement, let us celebrate a special moment: Volume 3 of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's Haydn project establishes him as a worthy successor. And better still, its scope is ambitious and is going to include many more sonatas than Brendel recorded, with each instalment arriving over the years, Bavouzet tells us, 'like a postcard, despatched during my travels with scant respect for chronological considerations, but undertaken with the greatest passion for trying to convey to 21st-century ears the boundless treasures of this sublime music'.

I am out of sorts with the fortepiano at the moment, while admitting that this in-between instrument now has some fine practitioners. No, bring Haydn out from under the bell-jar and let him resound on the modern instrument. Nothing less, to my mind,

is adequate for the C minor Sonata (HobXVI/20), which takes an honoured place here as the inspiration, indeed the fount, of classical piano sonatas in C minor to come – think of Mozart's, Beethoven's Op 10 No 1 and Schubert's – as well as being one of Haydn's best and perhaps also the first great sonata for the piano by anybody. Nothing of the interesting precursor about it in Bavouzet's vividly characterised performance, which comes across as properly monumental and weighs in at nearly 26 minutes.

As before in the series, the linked questions of repeats and ornamentation have much occupied him. In his answers he has shown the courage of his convictions, and I have been delighted, as I hope others will be, not so much by the quantity of his decoration in 'second' repeats – which is not contentious – but by his much bolder decision to save the codettas (ie final bars) of some movements for second repeats only. In the finale of the C minor Sonata he is bolder still, taking his cue from Haydn's unusual form-building and the high drama of the piano-writing: if I itemise his interpolation, at one unexpected point, of an unconventional cadenza that includes allusions to the previous movements, I'm sure I must anticipate some people's concerned reaction. You can't do that sort of thing in Haydn, can you? Yes you can, and perhaps you should. Do please listen to him.

The other three sonatas here are similarly characteristic, if lighter, and they leap off the page with Bavouzet's touch and insights. The one in E flat numbered 45 by Hoboken is from 1766 and of an exceptional breadth and expressiveness for that time; brilliance and difficulty as well. The D major Sonata (HobXVI/14) is probably earlier still, with a concentrated finale that plays wittily with silence and a five-note motif that together form a five-bar phrase. Who else but Haydn could have written that?

Lovely sound, deriving from a Yamaha piano and sessions at Pottton Hall in Suffolk in May this year.

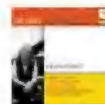
Stephen Plaistow

Liszt

Etude en douze exercices S136. Trois Etudes de concert, S144. Zwei Konzert-Etuden, S145. Rigoletto (Verdi) – Paraphrase de concert, S434. Ouverture zu Wagners Tannhäuser, S442

Idil Biret pf

Idil Biret Archive © 8 571286 (80' • DDD)



Purpose-built Liszt tribute from the Turkish pianist

For her second recorded tribute to the Liszt year Idil Biret offers a richly inclusive programme ranging from the *Etude en douze exercices* composed when Liszt was



Ralph van Raat:
playing his Pärt

13 to the *Tannhäuser* Overture, grandest and most demanding of his operatic paraphrases. A sparkling tribute to Liszt's teacher Czerny, the Op 6 Etudes, S136, are a far cry from their later reworking first in a monstrously inflated version and finally in the 12 *Études d'exécution transcendante* of 1851, where both pragmatically and artistically Liszt refined and clarified his previous work. Biret sweeps through the set with unfaltering assurance and in No 9, the prototype for 'La ricordanza' (later characterised by Busoni as like 'a packet of yellowed love letters') she is as affectionate as she is dextrous.

Elsewhere there are suspicions of a 'play the notes and the rest will look after itself' philosophy, most notably in 'Un sospiro', a sad let-down played without glamour or committent. There is greater success in 'Il lamento' from the same set of Etudes, where Biret rides its emotional storms with a thunder-and-lightning virtuosity. But her *Rigoletto Paraphrase de concert* is leaden and over-pedalled, quite without the elegance that can turn its glittering roulades into music of an endless enchantment and delight. Her *Tannhäuser*, too, is more capable than inspired, though she can certainly strike fire when needed. Overall, an uneven recital, well recorded but leaving an impression of quantity rather than quality.

Bryce Morrison

Pärt

Two Sonatinas, Op 1. Partita, Op 2. Variationen zur Gesundheit von Arinuschka. Für Alina. Für Anna Maria. Lamentate^a

Ralph van Raat *pf* ^aNetherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta
Naxos © 8 572525 (66' • DDD)



A champion of minimalism profiles Pärt the pianist

Pianist Ralph van Raat rightly declares in his booklet-notes that Arvo Pärt's music 'has caused a silent revolution in contemporary music with its simple harmonies, overtly melodic appeal and general absence of obvious complexity'. One has to wait, however, until the very last piece on this recording, the powerful *Lamentate: Homage to Anish Kapoor and his Sculpture 'Marsyas'* (2002) before van Raat's statement starts to hold true. And even then, this large-scale work is hardly 'classic' Pärt. Rather like the two *Wiegenlieder* written around the same time, the first movement's opening fanfare for brass is almost Mahlerian in tone and is followed by strikingly dissonant chords and agitated chromatic lines.

Indeed, with the exception of the enigmatic but highly significant *Für Alina* (1976), which heralded the development of Pärt's so-called tintinnabuli style, much of the composer's piano music dates from either very early on or very late. The two works that open this disc

belong to the composer's student days, with the Two Sonatinas recalling Hindemith and Shostakovich in its busy, direct neo-classical textures. The Partita looks to the 12-note direction taken by Pärt in the early 1960s with its atonal patterns and dramatic pedal points evoking Lutosławski's early set of études. Both represent end points in Pärt's stylistic development. *Lamentate* saves the day with its delicate droplets of sound and spiritual minimalist ambience. But it is more an orchestral work with a predominant piano part than a piano concerto per se. Van Raat's playing is convincing throughout but this disc hardly makes a convincing case for the centrality of Pärt's piano music to his oeuvre.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Rachmaninov • Ravel

Rachmaninov Piano Sonata No 1, Op 28

Ravel Miroirs. Sonatine

Hannes Minnaar *pf*

Etcetera © KTC1432 (79' • DDD)



Debut recital from 'one to watch' pianist

Given a free choice of concerto, anyone who opts for Saint-Saëns's Fifth for the finals of a major competition is clearly an independent spirit. In my book, that alone would put the contestant several marks ahead of their rivals. Young Hannes Minnaar (b1994) did just this for the 2010 Queen Elisabeth, where he came third (YouTube shows him in a terrific performance of the same concerto).

For his debut CD he displays further attributes as a convincing tonal colourist and ardent Romantic. I was much taken with the sound world Minnaar creates for Ravel, abetted by the recording – neither too intrusively close up nor too resonantly distant. In the upper half of the keyboard, where most of the action takes place in *Miroirs* and the *Sonatine*, he produces a fresh, silvery quality that yet has a lyrical warmth (hear how he handles the lovely passage marked *un peu retenu / très espressif* first heard at 0'42" in the *Modéré* movement of the *Sonatine*). 'Oiseaux tristes' is particularly fine, while the digital challenges of 'Alborada' are deftly addressed, the rapid repeated notes and *glissandi* executed with ease and elegance.

While it does not merit its relative neglect, Rachmaninov's First Sonata is a difficult work to bring off even in the greatest hands (Boris Berezovsky, for example), its Faustian background notwithstanding. Minnaar makes a persuasive case for it, though, bringing that same heartfelt touch to the slow movement ('Gretchen') and the beautiful *più mosso* section in the last movement (5'32"). He's a natural talent with a bold streak. I wish him well.

Jeremy Nicholas

Saint-Saëns

'Organs Works, Vols 2 & 3'

Preludes and Fugues – Op 99; Op 109. Trois Rhapsodies sur des cantiques bretons, Op 7. Fantaisies – in E flat; Op 101; Op 157. Sept Improvisations, Op 150

Gerard Brooks *org*

Priory ⑤ ② PRCD1049 (141' • DDD)

Played on the 1894 Cavaillé-Coll organ of St Antoine des XV-XX, Paris



Two discs more for Priory's Saint-Saëns organ cycle

For many, Saint-Saëns's most obvious contribution to the organ's repertory is the simple chord of C major which heralds the final section of his Third Symphony, but more devoted Saint-Saënsians will point to the Fantaisie in E flat which the 22-year-old composer wrote during his first major Parisian organist's appointment, at the church of Saint-Merry. That Gerard Brooks is devoting no fewer than four discs to the organ music of Saint-Saëns will come as a surprise, I imagine, to most people.

Brooks is hardly treading new ground here – in addition to many single discs devoted to Saint-Saëns's organ music, there are complete series available or emerging on Arte Nova (Stefan-Johannes Bleicher) and Hyperion (Andrew-John Smith) – and, in any case, the term 'complete' has a variety of interpretations in the context of Saint-Saëns. The first disc in this series was of transcriptions rather than genuine solo organ works but Vols 2 and 3, despite misleadingly having the word 'transcriptions' printed on the spine, are all original works created for organ alone, ranging from the 1857 Fantaisie in E flat to the C major Fantaisie of 1919 composed for King Manuel II of Portugal.

The playing is delightful in its open sincerity and clear affection for the music, and the recording absolutely honest, even down to the obtrusive action clatter. I prefer what is coming from Smith on Hyperion in terms of sound and all-round interpretative insight but the unique selling point of these two discs is the instrument itself, chosen, we read, because of its ability to capture the intimate nature of much of the music. As what was originally built by Cavaillé-Coll in 1894 for a private house, the organ certainly does have a charmingly intimate character, yet with an expanded specification of 46 speaking stops over three manuals and pedals, it has more than enough tonal variety to make for a richly colourful programme, and Brooks selects registrations with great sensitivity;

I particularly like the eloquent flutes in the second of the Op 99 Preludes and Fugues. It can also rattle the rafters as well as any of the big Cavaillé-Coll instruments, as we hear in the virtuoso E flat major work from the same set.

Delightful music, delightfully played and making a delightful sound, this is a very special addition to the Saint-Saëns discography. **Marc Rochester**

Smetana

Aus dem Studentenleben (polka), B30/110.

Bagatelles and Impromptus, B40.

Georginen-Polka, B13. Louisen-Polka, B12.

Souvenir of Pilsen, B37. Waltzes, B39.

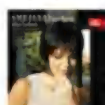
Three Impromptus. Duo sans mots, B27.

Mazurka-capriccio, B38. Galopp di bravoura, B7.

Galopp, B3. Quadrilles – B33; B36

Jitka Čechová *pf*

Supraphon ⑤ SU38452 (78' • DDD)



A fifth offering of Smetana piano works from Čechová

There are 22 short works on this disc and a good number more if you include each brief waltz and quadrille that forms the Quadrilles in F and B flat major. All were written between 1840 and 1844 with the exception of the Galopp in D fragment from about 1831. Smetana was still finding his feet and though the influences of Chopin, Schumann and occasionally Liszt hover over this collection it is the shallow end of the salon market that dominates style and melodic content. Had the music not got Smetana's name attached to it, I doubt if more than one or two pieces would have had the cobwebs brushed off, any more than the second-hand polkas, mazurkas and waltzes of the likes of Leybach, Ketterer, Ascher and other justly forgotten salon composers of the mid-19th century.

Sparks of individuality occasionally attract attention – the *Galopp di bravoura*, *Louisen-Polka* (a great favourite of Smetana himself) and the Impromptu in E flat minor – but for most of the course of the disc we are firmly in also-ran country. Miss Čechová has been closely recorded (over six days, it turns out), which exaggerates her sometimes heavy-handed approach in a balance that favours the bass.

This is her fifth volume of Smetana's music and I can't help feeling, having not the earlier ones, that this is a dutiful study of minor works of chief interest to completists. To hear the best of Smetana's unduly neglected piano works try the cherry-picked recitals by Kathryn Scott (Chandos, 8/11) and Claudius Tanski (Dabringhaus und Grimm).

Jeremy Nicholas

Jorge Bolet

H

Albéniz Cantos de España, Op 232^a – No 1, Prelude;

No 4, Córdoba. España, Op 165 – No 3, Malagueña^a

Beethoven Andante favori, WoO57^a Chopin Four

Scherzos^b Falla Pièces espagnoles^a – No 2, Cubana;

No 4, Andaluza Grandos Danzas españolas – No 5,

Andaluza (Playera)^a Lecuona Danzas afro-

cubanas^a – No 3, ...y la Negra Bailabal; No 4, Danza

de los Ñaños Liszt Funéailles, S173 No 7^a

Mendelssohn Hunting Song, Op 19 No 3^a. Rondo

capriccioso, Op 14^a Moszkowski En automne,

Op 36 No 4^a Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 2^c

Saint-Saëns Etude en forme de valse, Op 52 No 6^a

Jorge Bolet *pf*

^cCincinnati Symphony Orchestra / Thor Johnson

APR ⑤ ② APR6009 (138' • ADD)

Recorded ^a1952, ^bc1953



Early recordings from Bolet discovered and remastered

This invaluable reissue of discs dating from 1952-53 is a reminder of Jorge Bolet's early stature. The first-ever recording of Prokofiev's malignant, ferociously demanding Second Concerto is of so much more than documentary interest. For, even with a regrettable cut at the end of the first-movement cadenza/development, nothing can dim one's sense of Bolet's massive and unswerving authority, a quality at once lyrical and magisterial. A sombre and unsmiling giant of the piano ('well, I'm not Liberace'), he allows nothing to tempt him into histrionics or empty display.

A true aristocrat of the keyboard, his warmth and humanity strike you at every turn, as well as a communicative ardour less pronounced in many of his later, elder-statesman recordings for Decca. Hear him in Moszkowski's 'En automne' for that deep-into-the-keys, straight-from-the-shoulder virtuosity (for Gilels he was 'the only American pianist'), or in his formidably imposing way with Liszt's 'Funéailles', a reading that brought back memories of his performance at the Proms given in memory of Clifford Curzon.

There is more of 'that colossal workman of the keyboard' than Cortot's champagne sparkle in Saint-Saëns's Etude 'en forme de valse' but in Chopin's Four Scherzos everything is at the service of the music, backed by a thrilling if unostentatious mastery. An evocative brilliance characterises his visit to Spain (Falla, Granados and Albéniz) and how he relishes his all-too-brief memory of his native Cuba (Lecuona). APR's transfers are excellent but the accompanying essay, with its emphasis on Bolet's belated recognition and his ups and downs (mainly downs), fails to celebrate his first quality: a missed opportunity.

Bryce Morrison

Eileen Joyce



'The Complete Parlophone & Columbia

Solo Recordings, 1933-45'

Albéniz/Godowsky Tango, Op 165 No 2 **d'Albert** Scherzo, Op 16 No 2 **JS Bach** Fantasia and Fugue, BWV944 **Beethoven** Bagatelle, Op 33 No 2. Für Elise, WoO59 **S Bergman** Polka Caprice, Op 1 No 3. Himmelgesang, Op 2 No 1 **Brahms** Intermezzo, Op 76 No 6. Capriccio, Op 116 No 7. Intermezzo, Op 117 No 2. Six Pieces, Op 118 – Nos 2, 3 & 5. Four Pieces, Op 119 – Nos 3 & 4 **Chopin** Nocturnes – No 2, Op 9 No 2; No 9, Op 32 No 1. Fantasie-impromptu, Op 66. Berceuse, Op 57. Etude, Op 10 No 3. Ballades – No 1, Op 23; No 3, Op 47 **Debussy** Images – Reflets dans l'eau. Pour le piano – No 3, Toccata **Dohnányi** Rhapsody, Op 11 No 3 **Farjeon** Tarantella **Fauré** Impromptu No 2, Op 31 **Friedman** Viennese Dance No 2 **Granados** Goyescas – La maja y el ruiseñor **Grieg** Lyric Pieces – Op 43, Nos 1, 2 & 6; Op 47 No 3; Op 62 No 4; Op 71 No 2. Scherzo-impromptu, Op 73 No 2. Ballade, Op 24 **Henselt** Were I a bird, Op 2 No 6 **Hummel** Rondo, Op 11 **Liszt** Liebestraum, S541 No 3. Waldesrauchen, S145 No 1. Valse oubliée, S215 No 1. Au bord d'une source, S160 No 4. La leggierezza, S144 No 2. Gnomenreigen, S145 No 2. Prelude and Fugue, BWV543 (Bach), S462 No 1. Widmung (Schumann), S566. Frühlingsnacht (Schumann), S568. Spinning Chorus (Wagner), S440. Faust Waltz (Gounod), S407 (exc) **Mendelssohn** Rondo capriccioso, Op 14 **Mozart** Rondo, K386³. Suite, K399 – Allemande; Courante. Piano Sonatas – No 12, K322; No 16, K545; No 17, K576. Romance, KAnh205. Gigue, K574. Minuet, K355 **Moszkowski** Waltz, Op 34 No 1. Caprice espagnole, Op 37 (exc) **Palmgren** En route, Op 9 **Paradies** Piano Sonata No 6 – Toccata **Pick-Manguagakku** Le danse d'Olaf, Op 33 No 2 **Rachmaninov** Preludes: Op 23 Nos 5-8; Op 32 Nos 8 & 13 **Ravel** Jeux d'eau **Schlözer** Etude, Op 1 No 2 **Schubert** Andante, D604. Impromptus, D899 – No 2; No 4 **Schumann** Novelettes, Op 21 – No 2; No 6. Stücklein, Op 99 No 1 **C Scott** Lotus Land, Op 47 No 1. Danse nègre, Op 58 No 5 **Scriabin** Preludes, Op 11 – Nos 9 & 10 **Shostakovich** Three Fantastic Dances, Op 5 **Sibelius** Romance, Op 24 No 9 **Sinding** Rustle of Spring, Op 32 No 3 **Stavenhagen** Menuetto scherzando, Op 5 No 3 **R Strauss/Giesekeing** Ständchen, Op 17 No 2 **Eileen Joyce** *pf*^a orchestra / **Clarence Raybould** APR © 5 APR7502 (6h 8' • ADD)



Twelve-year tranche from an extraordinary piano exponent

Eileen Joyce (1912-91) was an astonishing Australian child prodigy who was born in a tent, grew up in squalor and could not read or write until she was 12. Her story is the stuff of legend (it was even filmed under the title *Wherever She Goes* in 1951 starring Joyce as her older self). Glamorous and immensely popular, she would think nothing of playing three or even four concertos in one evening, wearing a different dress for each

work. It was not for nothing that she was chosen to play Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto for the soundtrack of *Brief Encounter*. She gave her last recital in 1960, burnt out and disillusioned.

Of course, these 87 pieces were never designed to be heard in (roughly) chronological composer order, as here, in five sequences each lasting well over an hour, but listening to Joyce is strangely addictive. One cannot wait, as it were, to read the next chapter. She shares with Kreisler and Tauber the same unteachable ability to elevate the second-rate to the first-rate, and to illuminate familiar masterpieces with a convincing and unmistakable voice.

This is such a cornucopia of good things it is hard to know where to start, what to mention, what to omit. Disc 1 begins with a rarity (on piano, at least): Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV944. Apart from the typically unusual repertoire choice, one is immediately struck by an individual touch and sound, the kind of playing which might not suit all tastes but one to which one cannot listen with half an ear. Joyce's deft, sparingly pedalled light touch, her nonchalant speed and fluency and a palpable enjoyment of the task in hand are characteristic of her approach as a whole, which serves well the dizzying pace of the Fugue in particular. It does, too, in Paradies's Toccata, an elegantly paced account of Mozart's *Sonata facile* and the Rondo in A major, K386, the latter conducted by Clarence Raybould in 1936 (her only other Parlophone recording with orchestra was Turina's *Rapsodia sinfonica* with the same forces). Who else has taken up Mozart's Suite, K399, and Schubert's Andante in A major, D604? Not many. It is also uncommon to hear such unselfconscious repose as evinced by the two Chopin Nocturnes and Berceuse. Then there are the three Schumann pieces: in the last, 'Stücklein', No 1 of *Bunte Blätter*, you'll hear the nearest thing to a string *portamento* on the piano.

And that is a brief overview of just the first CD.

Disc 2 has eight pieces by Brahms, a rare example of a composer to whom Joyce seems unconnected, but they come after 11 by Liszt. These alone make the set worth buying and include 'La leggierezza', her first recording (June 1933), originally coupled with Paul de Schlözer's staggeringly difficult Etude in A flat, Op 1 No 2. It is undeniably one of the greatest piano discs ever made.

Sometimes you wish that she would dig into the keyboard more, but then in Rachmaninov's D flat Prelude, Op 32 No 13, she overdoes it (frighteningly so); sometimes she simply plays too fast and her impeccable articulation disintegrates into a blur (the two

Moszkowski pieces, d'Albert's Scherzo). But the disappointments are few, vastly outweighed by such joyous and justly celebrated accounts of six of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Palmgren's *En route* and Fauré's Impromptu No 2. Disc 5 and the last six tracks of disc 4 have her Columbia recordings. I cannot praise these too highly – I love the two exuberant Mozart sonatas – but it is Scriabin's little E major Prelude and Chopin's Etude in the same key that will persuade anyone who thinks of Joyce as a mere note-spinner of the fact that they are listening to a great artist.

The last time I enjoyed a set of CDs as much was one from the same label and was, by happy coincidence, devoted to Joyce's compatriot Percy Grainger, who set her off on her fabulous career. Bryce Morrison, whose friend Eileen Joyce was, contributes an essay *con amore*; Mark Obert-Thorn is responsible for the superb transfers and compilation; Mike Spring has produced. Full marks all round for an early Award contender.

Jeremy Nicholas

Olivier Latry

Alkan Préludes, Op 66 – No 5; No 10 **Boëly** 12 Pièces, Op 18 – No 1, Andante con moto; No 6, Fantaisie et fugue; No 7, Allegro ma non troppo. Pièces, Op 43 – No 7, Andante con moto; No 13, Toccata **Brahms** Prelude and Fugue, WoO10 **Liszt** Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine, S658. Prelude and Fugue on the Name B-A-C-H, S260 **Schumann** Four Sketches, Op 58

Olivier Latry *pedal pf*

Naïve © V5278 (76' • DDD)



An instrumental oddball in the hands of a great organist

Let me describe the instrument you are listening to because the chances are that, like me, you will have heard of a pedal piano but never actually heard one played. This one was built in 1853 by Érard of Paris, currently housed there in the Collection Musée de la Musique. Restored in 2009, it is the very one with which Alkan amazed his audiences and subsequently kept in his home till his death. It looks exactly like a (straight-strung) grand piano except that where you expect two legs and pedal mechanism is a kind of stunted upright piano case. An organist's bench is attached to this by a frame containing a straight pedalboard of 32 notes above which are placed, disconcertingly for any pianist, the *forte* and *una corda* pedals. Even the great Olivier Latry has to admit that 'organists require special training to play it'.

That said, a little *piano pédalier* goes a long way, especially if you are accustomed to hearing the Liszt and Schumann works on the organ on which they are far more effective.

Realistically recorded, there is no disguising the fact that the *pédalier* is a percussion instrument (try Schumann's Op 58 No 4) which produces a certain amount of clunking in the playing process. True, the five short Boëly works are charming curiosities, but it is two of Alkan's Op 66 Préludes that impress the most. The disc is nicely presented, as you'd expect from Naïve, though reading the notes on the music is like wading through treacle.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Alone'

Kodály Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8 **Shchedrin** Russian Fragments **Sollima** Alone. Lame **Schnittke** Improvisation **Casals** Song of the Birds

Boris Andrianov v.c.

Quartz Ⓢ QTZ2080 (56' • DDD)



Four strings only in recital from a Moscow professor

It takes remarkable powers of concentration for a performer to sustain nearly an hour of solo cello music without any support from an accompanying instrument. In this formidable sequence of works the young Russian cellist Boris Andrianov does that triumphantly, starting with the most demanding cello work of all after Bach, the Solo Sonata of Zoltán Kodály.

Each of the three movements lasts around 10 minutes, testing the cellist to the limit in one of the most powerful works that Kodály ever wrote. The depth of Andrianov's concentration can readily be measured by the exceptionally slow tempo he adopts in the central *Adagio*, with no hint of tension slipping. That leads to a dazzling account of the finale, in which Andrianov brings out the strong Hungarian flavours to the full.

The *Russian Fragments* of Rodion Shchedrin bring much lighter fare, a charming sequence demonstrating his style at its most approachable. *Alone* by the Sicilian cellist Giovanni Sollima was written for a cello competition in Milan and it certainly tests the performer to the limit in music both slow and fast, with Andrianov relishing the challenge.

The *Improvisation* of Alfred Schnittke brings a sequence of striking ideas that make great demands on the cellist, while the well-known folk-based *Song of the Birds* by Pablo Casals – the cellist who more than any other transformed attitudes to the instrument – brings a performance notably purer than those of Casals himself, at least in his last years. It makes an intensely beautiful close to a most impressive recital, very well recorded in a German church.

Edward Greenfield

'From the Street'

Janáček On an Overgrown Path.

Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, 'From the Street'

Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 2, Op 14

Ravel Valses nobles et sentimentales

Ivana Gavrić pf

Champs Hill Ⓢ CHRC0026 (00' • DDD)



Recital number two from Janáček specialist Gavrić

Ivana Gavrić's debut disc offered an intense, idiomatic account of Janáček's *In the Mists* that made me curious as to how she'd handle this composer's other piano works. Her follow-up recital answers that question quite positively. In the Sonata, she heightens the speech-like phrasing by overtly differentiating the composer's sometimes idiosyncratic articulation markings. Similarly, she varies the second movement's dynamic extremes with alluring changes in tone colour that compensate for a slightly too brisk tempo that sidesteps the music's desolate aura.

The intimacy, finely honed nuance, conversational flow and subtle underlining of the composer's harmonic surprises that Gavrić brings to each of the short pieces comprising *On an Overgrown Path* prove more memorable still. Some of Gavrić's phrase-tapering in Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* lessens the impact of the composer's own indications for tempo modification. She also slightly pacifies No 7's soaring climaxes, and doesn't really observe No 5's 'breath mark' commas that are intended to clear the textural air, so to speak. Still, Gavrić obviously revels in the piano-writing's sensuality and gentle resonance. The same can be said for the first movement of the Prokofiev sonata, with its extensive lyrical passages.

Although Gavrić sustains the *Scherzo*'s motoric momentum perfectly, she primarily sets her sights upon connecting the melodic dots that leap from one register to the next, while her attention to the *Andante*'s dynamic hairpins reveals a tuneful subtext that's not often perceived. The *Vivace* finale bristles with wit and light-fingered transparency, although some listeners might prefer additional ferocity and steel-edged bravura in the manner of Sviatoslav Richter, as well as less opaque, more vividly detailed engineering.

Jed Distler

Prokofiev – selected comparison:

Richter (3/09) (BBCL) BBCL4245-2

'The Liszt Project'

Bartók Four Dirges, Sz45 – No 4, Nénie **Berg** Piano Sonata, Op 1 **Liszt** Piano Sonata, S178. La lugubre gondola, S200. Nuages gris, S199. Unstern! Sinistre, S208. Années de pèlerinage – Vallée d'Obermann,

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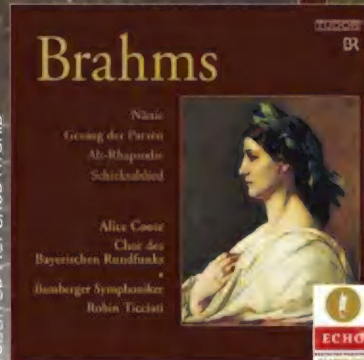
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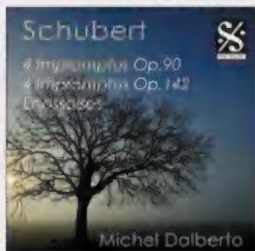
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Pierre-Laurent Aimard *pf*

DG ② 477 9439GH2 (146' • DDD)



Aimard pays homage to Liszt: influences, refractions and all

Emblazoned with a 'Liszt 200' sticker, this double album commends itself primarily as a take-home document of the recitals Pierre-Laurent Aimard has been giving during the Liszt bicentenary. 'Each work emerged as stylistically unique and uniquely enthralling', said the *Washington Post*, quoted on the back of the case; but that is the only indication here Aimard has been performing this music in recitals, with each of the CDs matching his concert programmes. I wish Deutsche Grammophon had been more forthcoming because as a piece of record production 'The Liszt Project' will win no prizes, and anyone picking it up not having attended the concerts might wonder what they had got.

The listing of items contains an inaccuracy and the conversation with the artist in the booklet ('Autour de Liszt'), though making interesting points, has all the feel of a departure-lounge rush-job. It explains how the programmes were put together but communicates next to nothing as why each item may be 'stylistically unique' and where it comes from. I suppose a rejoinder might be that anyone buying the discs could find that out for themselves, but I think many people will wish for more background.

Aimard's selection is designed to juxtapose Liszt with compositions of more recent times and to position him as a man who threw a lance far into the future. This makes for intriguing listening, particularly in the pairs of pieces on disc 2 which trace a trajectory (very generally) from darkness into light. The Berg Sonata and Scriabin's Ninth are welcome too, on disc 1, though not to my mind the Wagner that the great man doodled for Mathilde Wesendonck's album and for which 'sonata' is surely too big a word. In the main, the later the Liszt the more impressive Aimard is: in items such as *Nuages gris*, *Unstern!* and one of the 'lugubrious gondola' pieces he is ideally persuasive that no composer stayed younger in his desire to make something new.

I wish I could warm to his reading of 'Vallée d'Obermann' which for the greater part, until the major key arrives, seems to me simply too slow – a trudge through grandiose

introspection rather than a rhapsodic soliloquy. It needs to be sustained by a strong poetic impulse, and unlike the Sonata in B minor cannot be played as 'pure' music. Likewise *St François d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux* – a long way from Messiaen.

Aimard's reading of the B minor Sonata is distinguished – intellectually satisfying, as it should be, as the most intelligent and far-reaching of all post-Beethoven sonatas on a large scale. As well as the excitement, I shall expect to sense the span of the whole more vividly when I hear his London performance later this year, a dimension which often retreats from appreciation, a bit, in an edited recording. Do any parts of these discs derive from his concerts in Vienna back in May? I think they may do but we are not told. And while I am being grouchy, I have heard better Steinways and better recordings of them.

Stephen Plaistow

'Masterpieces for Harp'

Britten Suite, Op 83 **Houdy** Harp Sonata **Pierné** Impromptu-caprice, Op 9 **Rosetti** Harp Sonata **Salzedo** Variations sur un thème dans le style ancien, Op 30 **Spohr** Fantasy, Op 35

Astrid von Brück *hp*

New Classical Adventures ② 60225 (55' • DDD)



Explorations from the Dresden Staatskapelle's principal harp

Edward Greenfield recently reviewed a collection of harp miniatures excellently played by Lavinia Meijer (Channel Classics, 8/11). The present disc spreads its net wider and also includes a useful history of the harp's development from the introduction of pedals by the German Hochbrucker in 1720. This brought the social requirement for cultivated ladies of the 18th century to take up the instrument, which did not please Beethoven, who saw the harp taking temporary domestic precedence over the piano. Only two pieces are common to both these recitals, Pierné's engaging *Impromptu-caprice* and Spohr's characteristically fluent Fantasy. So if you enjoy the harp, the two discs are recommendable as a pair.

However, the present recital has the advantage of including three especially attractive works, the delightful Salzedo Variations, the Sonata by French-Canadian Pierick Houdy (b1929), who keeps reminding the listener of a peal of bells, and Britten's masterly five-movement Suite, written for Osian Ellis. It is like no other solo work for harp. Consistently inventive and melodically appealing, it brings constant changes of mood and colour, and a central Nocturne, richly sustained, followed by a rippling Fugue and a closing solemn 'Hymn (St Denio)' which is utterly haunting. **Ivan March**

'Rarities of Piano Music 2010'

CPE Bach Keyboard Sonata, Wq 59 No 1 H281^a

Bentzon Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op 1^b

Busoni Prelude, Op 37 No 14 K181^c. All' Italia! (In modo napolitano), K249 No 2^d **Heller** Four

Freischütz Studies, Op 127^e – No 1; No 3 **Helps** Hommage à Fauré^f **Pasternak** Two Preludes^g, Piano Sonata^h **Wagner/Kocsis** Parsifal – Flower Maidens' Scene and Finaleⁱ

^aGiovanni Bellucci, ^bIan Fountain, ^cPeter Froudjian,

^dMarc-André Hamelin, ^eMichail Lifits, ^fJenny Lin,

^gEldar Nebolsin, ^hJean-Frédéric Neuburger,

ⁱHiroaki Takenouchi *pfs*

Danacord ② DACOD709 (77' • DDD)

Recorded live at Schloss vor Husum, Germany.

August 2010



Another harvest of little-known works from Schloss vor Husum

The Schloss vor Husum Festival has just marked its 25th year. A celebration of the byways of piano literature, much of it relegated to ill-deserved obscurity, it has encouraged an assortment of outstanding pianists to relax in a convivial and rewarding atmosphere where they are free to perform music frowned on by more commercially minded venues. Once again all the performances on the offering from 2010 are as sympathetic as you could wish.

There is Marc-André Hamelin, a true and loyal friend to Husum, in CPE Bach, relishing every twist and turn of the argument. No need to worry about rubato like so much 'daylight robbery' (the booklet-note), for Hamelin plays with all of his legendary discipline and authority. Jean-Frédéric Neuburger tosses off two Heller storm-in-a-teacup Etudes (though No 3 has a charming central section) with all the necessary aplomb, and Ian Fountain gives us a sizeable Wagner-Kocsis transcription with special commitment. Busoni's austere funeral march of a Prelude must have sent the audience out into the night haunted and provoked, and how fascinating to be reminded that the author of *Doctor Zhivago* was a composer of distinction, following Scriabin's path from early Romanticism to an altogether more cloudy and obsessive idiom. Peter Froudjian hardly needs an introduction at Husum and his performance of Jørgen Bentzon's Variations on Chopin's F major Mazurka, Op 68 No 3, is fluent and persuasive. Finally Robert Helps's heartfelt tribute to Fauré, a composer whose outward urbanity often hid so many subtle and dark secrets. Once again this is an invaluable enterprise; and, with the promise of 2011's celebrations of both Liszt's more rarely heard works and music by York Bowen, there are clearly riches to follow. **Bryce Morrison**



Richard Wigmore reviews
Eric Tappy's Schöne Mullerin
'Too many songs unfold as tear-stained suicide notes, with sluggish tempi, lumpy phrasing and sloppy rhythms' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 87



Guy Rickards reviews
Thommessen's Veslemøy synsk
'Marianne Beate Kielland sings, and occasionally speaks and wails, superbly throughout' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 89

Johann Christoph Bach

'Welt, gute Nacht'

Herr, wende dich und sei mir gnädig. Mit Weinen hebt sich's an. Wie bist du den, o Gott. Der Gerechte, ob er gleich zu zeitlich stirbt. Ach, dass ich Wassers g'nug hätte. Fürchte dich nicht. Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben. Meine Freundin, du bist schön

Julia Doyle, Katharine Fuge *sops* **Clare Wilkinson** *mez*
Jeremy Budd, James Gilchrist, Nicholas Mulroy *tens*
Matthew Brook, Peter Harvey *basses*

English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner

Soli Deo Gloria © SDG715 (78' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Cadogan Hall, London, April 2009



Live recordings of rare music from the Bach dynasty

Johann Christoph Bach, the cousin of Johann Sebastian's father, Ambrosius, has the reputation of being a musician's composer, something of a hidden treasure. This recording from the English Baroque Soloists under Sir John Eliot Gardiner feels like a labour of love. But it's not easy to explain what is so special about his music. As the late Richard Campbell noted in his typically thoughtful essay accompanying the disc, he's a seeker after subtle effects that make their impact at once but deliver still more with repeated listening (late-night listening, this, perhaps with a whisky having similar properties). Nearly every piece has a singular gesture or feature that captures the imagination. And one feels the proximity of more distant German music, and even of Monteverdi on occasion.

The vocal soloists acquit themselves well in music that demands utter commitment, although just occasionally the last degree of refinement and control eludes them (as might be expected on what is otherwise a quite exceptional live recording). In a *cappella* formation, however, they offer some of the disc's most memorable moments: not for nothing has the disarmingly simple 'Welt, gute Nacht' been chosen for the disc's title. Among the instrumentalists one must mention Maya Hornburger, who works wonders in the slightly over-extended dialogue 'Meine

Freundin, du bist schön'; but finally it's fitting that the disc is dedicated to the memory of Richard Campbell, a fastidious and serious musician whose tragic death earlier this year has been much mourned, more so probably than he himself could have imagined.

Fabrice Fitch

JS Bach

'Cantatas, Vol 49'

Cantatas - No 156, Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe; No 159, Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem; No 171, Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm; No 188, Ich habe meine Zuversicht

Rachel Nicholls *sop* **Robin Blaze** *counter*

Gerd Türk *ten* **Peter Kooij** *bass*

Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki

BIS © BIS-SACD1891 (72' • DDD/DS • T/t)



The 49th issue in Suzuki's cycle covers three late cantatas

A combination of lost works and Bach's gradual retreat from his breathtakingly prolific cantata production in the very early Leipzig years sees Masaaki Suzuki here covering three works written between 1727 and 1729. Perhaps 'covering' is not entirely inappropriate in this case, as these are consistently expert performances but ones which carry a less intriguing spirit of enquiry than in recent volumes.

Most beguiling is *Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe*, BWV156, a cantata whose economy of means is emblematic of a composer looking increasingly towards a late style of yet greater tactical artistic precision. The opening oboe sinfonia (an unornamented version to become the elegant slow movement of the F minor Harpsichord Concerto) floats effortlessly into a delectable tenor aria – a preparation for death whose wrong-footed ritornello, shimmering cantus firmus and chiselled harmonic wonders play into Gerd Türk's experienced hands. Robin Blaze, another fine stalwart, raises his game – his contributions otherwise seem a touch less coloured than in previous releases – in another aria of quietly dazzling but un-didactic contrapuntal dialogue. Elsewhere

there is rather less compelling engagement.

The opening of BWV159 is uneventful – which a conversation with Christ really shouldn't be – and the fine tenor aria of BWV188 (*Ich habe meine Zuversicht*) is generically effective but without the charm and warmth of Gardiner (SDG, 10/10). The same is perhaps not quite true in the show-stopping 'Es ist vollbracht' from the former work, where Peter Kooij summons true nobility of utterance in this most finite of elegies but, alas, not the vocal élan of Peter Harvey, again for Gardiner (5/06).

This is a touch disappointing in the light of an otherwise strong run-in to the end of this most assiduous and steady of the 'studio' *gesamt*-series.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

JS Bach

Trauer-Musik - Music to Mourn Prince Leopold, BWV244a (reconstr Parrott)

Taverner Consort and Players / Andrew Parrott

Avie © AV2241 (79' • DDD • T/t)



A reimagining of familiar Passion material

An enterprising reconstruction of a Bachian musical funeral presents a welcome return for Andrew Parrott and his pioneering Taverner Consort and Players after several years. Needless to say with Parrott, there is a pinch of polemical spice: a reimagining of Prince Leopold of Cöthen's funeral in 1728 with the extant text adorned by music from the *St Matthew Passion* and the *Trauer Ode* (Cantata No 198) composed for the death of the Electress of Saxony a year earlier.

The adaptation takes some getting used to, especially when applying examples from the 'holy grail' of the *St Matthew Passion* ('Erbarne dich' becoming 'Erhalte mich' and so on). By and large, hearing the Passion in a different context is deeply affecting, whatever one feels about speculative reworkings; the way the two pieces intersect within the ritual of the imagined service is indeed plausible, strengthened by the Passion-infused music in the Ode, which explains why Bach reused it for his now lost *St Mark Passion*.

Ultimately, the performances must be taken on their own terms and thankfully they exhibit some of the time-honoured qualities of Parrott as the master-refiner, a director with a tactile sense of the inner workings of each movement and the subtle balance between singer and instrumentalist. The larger ensemble movements contain many revelatory moments in their easy, poignant lyricism and the heights are reached in the bittersweet music early on (though track 6, '14", has an unfortunate editing blip). The recitatives are newly composed by the director, though with recognisable Bachian derivations.

Parrott introduces two fine, fresh singers in Clare Wilkinson and Tom Meglitoranza alongside soloists from the early years of the Taverners, of whom Charles Daniels is the most durable, evident in 'Geh, Leopold' ('Ich will bei meinem' from the *St Matthew*), where his experience and vocal intelligence bring special poignancy to the lamentation. The obbligatos are all top-drawer (what sweet violin-playing in 'Erhalte mich') and contribute to this tombeau with distinction. Parrott's critical uncovering of new meaning and intention is always thought-provoking and especially so in this compelling curiosity.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Ciconia

'Opera omnia - Complete Works'

Diabolus in Musica / Antoine Guerber;

La Morra / Corina Marti, Michal Gondko

Ricercar © ② RIC316 (158' • DDD • T/I)



After a quarter-century's wait, a new complete set of Ciconia

Ciconia has done very well in the recording studios and is easily the most-recorded composer active in the years around 1400. From the time of Alfred Deller's unforgettable 'O rosa bella' (1953) and particularly the Studio der Frühen Musik's Ciconia record of 1972, there is hardly an early music performer anywhere who has not faced up to the polyrhythmic challenges of 'Sus un fontayne' or the dizzying roudades of 'Per quella strada'. So these and other favourites have been recorded many times. But as with any composer there are many works that are rarely heard, in Ciconia's case particularly the Mass movements.

That is why Paul van Nevel recorded Ciconia's complete known works with the Huelgas Ensemble back in 1982 (reissued on CD in 1998 - Pavane, nla) - a set that may have its unevennesses but also includes a fair number of scintillating performances. It made Ciconia the only substantial composer before Dowland to benefit from an *intégrale*. Now, benefiting from the 1985 critical edition of the music and a further quarter-century's



Pioneering: Andrew Parrott and Emily van Evera

performances and investigations, we have a second recording.

This time the task has been divided: Antoine Guerber and *Diabolus in Musica* take on the sacred music and the motets; La Morra, directed by Corina Marti and Michal Gondko, present the songs. It works well. *Diabolus in Musica* go for a bright and light sound that contrasts very much with the heavier performances of Paul van Nevel. La Morra prefer a more ruminative and thoughtful approach to the songs that is again entirely different from what has been heard before - including what must be the slowest-ever performance of 'Per quella strada'. As with any complete recording, some tracks are better than others, but we do get a new and clearer aural picture of who Ciconia was.

The set comes with an essay on Ciconia by Philippe Vendrix, notes on the music by the respective directors and good translations of the texts, in some cases going beyond what is in the available literature. I must add that the producer Jérôme Lejeune dedicates it to his mother, Suzanne Clercx-Lejeune, whose research and whose infectious enthusiasm first put Ciconia seriously onto the map in the 1960s. It is a fitting tribute.

David Fallows

Handel

'Streams of Pleasure'

Alexander Balus - Fury with red sparkling eyes; Fair virtue shall charm me. Belshazzar - Destructive war; Great victor, at your feet I bow. Hercules - My father. Joseph and his Brethren - Prophetic raptures swell my breast. Joshua - Our limpid

streams with freedom flow. Judas Maccabaeus - From this dread scene. Solomon - Can I see my infant gor'd; Welcome as the dawn of day. Susanna - Crystal streams in murmurs flowing. Theodora - To thee, thou glorious son of worth; Streams of pleasure ever flowing; As with rosy steps the morn; Oh! that I on wings could rise

Karina Gauvin sop Marie-Nicole Lemieux contr

Il Complesso Barocco / Alan Curtis

Naïve © V5261 (75' • DDD • T)



Solos and duets from Handel's late oratorios

The omens looked good. An uncliché selection of arias and duets from Handel's late oratorios, two fine, distinctive singers well versed in the Baroque, and a conductor and orchestra of proven Handelian *savoir faire*. There is indeed plenty to enjoy, especially when soprano Karina Gauvin is involved. Balancing dramatic intensity and a pure singing line, she gives as moving a performance as I have heard of the first harlot's 'Can I see my infant gor'd?' from *Solomon*, infinitely tender at the opening, erupting with mingled heartbreak and outrage as she yields her baby to the false mother.

Gauvin is blithely elegant in the little-known 'Prophetic raptures' from *Joseph*, its tricky leaps effortlessly negotiated, and unfurls limpid, skimming coloratura in Theodora's cathartic 'Oh! that I on wings could rise'. Iole's 'My father', from *Hercules*, one of Handel's most piercing expressions of grief, is another intensely 'lived' performance, though pleasure was mitigated by an over-

intrusive harpsichord continuo – a recurrent problem on this disc that may irritate others less than it does me.

Gauvin's fellow Canadian Marie-Nicole Lemieux, a true contralto rather than a pushed-down mezzo, is a singer with temperament to burn. Her no-holds-barred performances of 'Destructive war' (*Belsbazaar*) and 'Fury with red sparkling eyes' from *Alexander Balus*, complete with violent chesty plunges, are thrilling. But in less overwrought music – say, Irene's exquisite sunrise aria from *Theodora*, or the two poignant duets from the same oratorio – I wanted less gusty phrasing, more care for true *legato*. Orchestral accompaniments are trim and lively, though bass-lines could at times be more sensitively shaped – not just a question of excessive harpsichord jangle. If this is not quite the Handel recital I was hoping for, it's still worth investigating for Lemieux's viscerally exciting singing and, above all, Gauvin's ideal Handelian mix of grace and profound emotional truth.

Richard Wigmore

Herrmann • Cadman



Cadman Dark Dances of the Mardi Gras^a

Herrmann Moby Dick^b

^aCharles Wakefield Cadman *pf* ^bWilliam Hain *ten*

^bRobert Weede *bar* ^bMen's voices of the Westminster

Choir; Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New

York / John Barbirolli

Barbirolli Society (M) SJB1056 (51' • DDD)

Recorded at Carnegie Hall New York,

^aDecember 5, 1937; ^bApril 14, 1940

Herrmann



Moby Dick^a. Sinfonietta

^aRichard Edgar-Wilson *ten* ^aDavid Wilson-Johnson *bar*

^aDanish National Choir; Danish National Symphony

Orchestra / Michael Schönwandt

Chandos (P) CHSA5095 (63' • DDD • T)



Old and new recordings of the film composer's whale-based cantata

As his centenary year draws to a close it is good to be reminded of the strength and quality of Herrmann's non-film music. These two releases do him a great service. Melville's *Moby-Dick* had been a boyhood favourite, possibly influenced by his father's own experiences as a whaler. Having initially considered setting the novel as an opera, he eventually settled on a concert work. Following inspirational 'site visits' to Massachusetts with his librettist, William Clark Harrington, Herrmann composed the cantata between 1936 and 1938. It is a remarkably vivid piece, displaying the dramatic skills learnt in the composing atelier

of a radio studio, and deserves to be much better known and more often performed.

The Barbirolli Society's disc is of the first broadcast performance, made three days after the world premiere in Carnegie Hall. Herrmann revised the work in 1973, having previously made his own recording in 1967 for the Pye Virtuoso label with the LPO (later released on a 1993 Unicorn-Kanchana CD). Barbirolli's Captain Ahab was the stentorian Robert Weede; his Ishmael (the narrator) the tenor William Hain, who is on beautiful form, especially in the pastel-coloured aria 'It was a clear steel-blue day'. Barbirolli drives the drama along with an almost reckless glee. Another highlight is the 'gallumphing' drunken sailor's 'Oh! Jolly is the gale'. The excellent radio balance is occasionally compromised by some crumbling of the ancient 'acetates' signal. This 40-minute performance is full of pep and palpable excitement. The new Danish recording comes in at around 46 minutes, the same as Herrmann's own recording. In surround sound it is simply stunning with vivid singing and playing, all of the highest order.

Each disc comes with an interesting filler. For Barbirolli, Charles Wakefield Cadman (1881-1946) is the piano soloist in his own Mardi Gras-inspired *Dark Dances*, a piece much in vogue in 1930s America, captured here from Carnegie Hall in a December 1937 broadcast. On Chandos the Danish National SO strings offer the premiere

recording of the original version of Herrmann's highly expressionist 1936 Sinfonietta, used later as the model for parts of *Psycho*. Both discs are thoroughly enjoyable and worthy of exploration.

Malcolm Riley

Josquin Desprez

Missa de Beata Virgine. Missa Ave maris stella.

Credo quarti toni

Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell (P) CDGIM044 (76' • DDD)



Two contrasting Masses performed by Josquin experts

This is a neatly selected group of pieces. Josquin's *Missa de Beata Virgine* was by far his most successful work, to judge from the enormous number of early copies that still survive; but it has had far less luck in modern times, being in many ways the least obviously Josquinian and the least obviously beautiful of his Masses. Even so, if there's one thing that recent Josquin research has tended to show, it is that it is time to be a little less confident about our own musical instincts and to find ways of loving something like the *Missa de Beata Virgine* in all its apparent ungainliness. And the Tallis Scholars have made this a lot easier, because theirs is a performance one wants to listen to many times.

Alongside this they have what is perhaps the loveliest of his Masses, the *Ave maris stella*,

Peter Dijkstra: keeps
Poulenc flowing



PHOTOGRAPHY: WILDUNDEISE.DE

flowing and graceful throughout, even if the 'Pleni' seems a touch long and the singers rather hammer the life out of the 'Osanna'. And then they provide us with a serious rarity, the *Credo quarti toni*, known from only a single manuscript (which is always a bit suspicious) but – as John Milsom argues in his lucid note about it – showing a fairly strong documentary case for its really being by Josquin.

Partly because of their success, Peter Phillips and the Tallis Scholars tend to divide music lovers. For my own part I'm happy to live with the women's voices (I mean: what voices!) and a certain sameness in the interpretations for the absolute clarity, the absolute efficiency, the certainty that nobody is messing around with you. These are authoritative performances that can stand the test of time.

David Fallows

Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde

Jadwiga Rappé *contr* Piotr Kusiewicz *ten* Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Katowice / Michael Zilm

Dux ④ DUX0810 (66' • ADD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Grzegorz Fitelberg Concert Hall, Culture Centre, Katowice, November 10, 1989



A Polish Radio performance of Mahler's earth-shattering work

Given that the Tang Dynasty poets who inspired Mahler's famous song-symphony were known for cutting loose, it's not uncommon for tenors to show a bit of reckless exuberance. That said, Piotr Kusiewicz rather abuses the privilege, opening with a performance of 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' that exudes far too much drunken abandon and nothing at all of the Earth's sorrow.

Unfortunately, Kusiewicz is symptomatic of the recording as a whole. Under conductor Michael Zilm, the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice is so undisciplined in its ensemble playing, so lacking in overall musical focus, that we often seem to be listening to a rehearsal rather than a performance. Tempi are often idiosyncratic, with 'Von der Jugend' and 'Von der Schönheit' running between 15 seconds and a minute longer than most recordings in the catalogue – a detail notable mainly because the glacial pace loses both musical line and dramatic momentum. So too do the winds and brass often protrude sonically, as if sloppily grafted on to a background of strings with little symphonic context. This may be emphasised by the recording quality, which does the winds few timbral favours and emphasises stridency over warmth in the

strings. But the frequent lack of musical coherence, with some lines ending abruptly and others pointing in vague directions, can hardly be blamed on an engineer.

Alto Jadwiga Rappé fares better, and once into 'Der Abschied', both song and symphony manage to settle together quite pleasantly. But by that time, we're more than halfway through the disc.

Ken Smith

Nono

Risonanze erranti². Post-prae-ludium per Donau³

^aSusanne Otto *contr* ^aRoberto Fabbriani *fl*

^{ab}Klaus Burger *tba* SWR Experimental Studio /

³Detlef Heusinger

Neos ④ NEOS11119 (54' • DDD • T)



A debut recording for this avant-gardist's Resonances

Risonanze erranti a Massimo Cacciari, premiered in 1986, spins out of the compositional multiverse Luigi Nono created for *Prometeo*, his mid-1980s opera. For *Prometeo*, 'opera' actually feels like entirely the wrong word: spatial dispersion of voices, instruments and electronics locates any 'action' within the unfolding sounds – there's no narrative 'plot' – an idea that *Risonanze erranti* advances more resourcefully, arguably, than any other post-*Prometeo* Nono.

The declamatory vocal writing at the beginning, its gestural peaks landscaped by clattering percussion, is briefly reminiscent of 'classic' period political Nono – *Il canto sospeso* and *Intolleranza 1960* – but Nono's 'risonanza erranti' ('wandering resonances') soon push the structure open. Very occasionally the electronics show their age: at 34'50" the gadgetry Nono deploys to harmonise Susanne Otto's voice with itself sounds manufactured by today's standards, but otherwise his tactic is to have electronics mess with our perception of time.

Electronically treated percussion is stacked against live percussion; the electronic percussion resonates with a different spectral shape to the real-time playing – simultaneous layers of time tick together, and time is everything here. Spiritually, this music that forever speaks of the future has, Nono divulges, roots in fragmented quotes from Ockeghem, Machaut, Josquin Desprez. Susanne Otto's singing carries the notion that there's an important structural distinction to be made between overarching text – 'that's what happened then' – and the diced-up fragments of text which move the piece towards a questioning finish more open-ended than its beginning: fleeting moments of 'now'.

This is *Risonanze erranti*'s long overdue debut on CD; *Post-prae-ludium per Donau*, for

tuba and live electronics, has been recorded before but never with such an intimate, stark sound environment. **Philip Clark**

Poulenc

Mass in G. Figure humaine.

Un soir de neige. Sept chansons

Swedish Radio Choir / Peter Dijkstra

Channel Classics ④ CCSSA31411 (61' • DDD)



Four intense choral cycles from the French master of irony

Schoenberg wasn't wrong when he said (in 1925) that modern composers could only write introductions, 'able only to place one thing next to another'. In his instrumental music, Poulenc chose to do this with panache, but the choral works are something else: masterful, all four 'cycles' on this disc, untainted by ironic expressions and embodying the sense of the text through form and harmony. Each of the four songs of *Un soir de neige* gets straight to the heart of the matter, which in this instance is a wintry journey of despair, more heavily flecked than the better-known Eluard cycle of the following year, *Figure humaine*, by modal, Parsifalian sequences of pathless wandering and unanticipated illumination.

The Swedish Radio Choir joins a very few professional ensembles – the most pre-eminent listed below – in being fully equal to the challenges of tuning and dynamic flexibility that larger ensembles and cathedral choirs must negotiate with inevitable losses in rhythmic freedom. Ribbons of joy fly brightly through the *Gloria* and *Sanctus* of the Mass from 1937; the two Apollinaire poems bookending the *Sept chansons* of 1936 dance with Janequin-like glee. Peter Dijkstra keeps the music moving and flowing, and only the penultimate fugue of *Figure humaine* feels rushed; the bitter *scherzo* of 'Riant du ciel' is pointed with astonishing brilliance. It's in the following reflection, and similar slow movements, that I miss the fruitier voices and more intimately turned response of the native members of Accentus. Channel Classics places the Swedish choir nearer the microphones but the Naïve disc communicates to me most vividly what the cycle must have meant to its first listeners in bombed-out London and worn-out Paris.

Peter Quantrill

Selected comparisons:

Sixteen, Christophers (12/93, 3/10) (VIRG) 562431-2

Accentus, Equilbey (8/01) (NAIV) V4883

Schubert

Die schöne Müllerin, D795

Eric Tappy *ten* Ruben Lifschitz *pf*

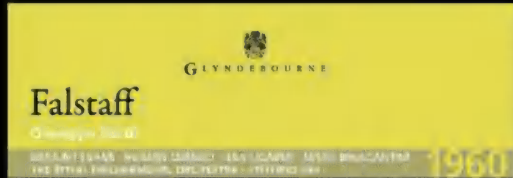
Claves ④ 50 1105 (71' • DDD)

Recorded 1974



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A Swiss tenor's '70s radio recording of *Schöne Müllerin*

Renowned in roles ranging from Monteverdi's Orfeo, via Mozart, to Golaud in *Pelléas*, Swiss tenor Eric Tappy left me uninvolved in this 1974 radio recording of *Die schöne Müllerin*. His distinctive, rather reedy tone, not unpleasing when he sings softly, becomes abrasive at *forte* and above. More crucially, his expression tends to veer between hectic over-emphasis (say, in 'Ungeduld' or 'Eifersucht und Stolz', both relentlessly loud) and maudlin self-pity.

Purity and simplicity of line do not seem to lie within Tappy's orbit. Too many songs unfold as tear-stained suicide notes, with sluggish tempi, lumpy phrasing and sloppy rhythms. The gentle musing of 'Danksagung an den Bach' here becomes a dirge. Slow speeds grow ever more enervating towards the end of the cycle. 'Trockne Blumen' and 'Der Müller und der Bach' are insufferably lachrymose, devoid of any sense of catharsis or spirituality, with Tappy indulgently sliding and swelling into notes. The recorded balance consigns pianist Ruben Lifschitz to near-anonymity. Set against a clutch of recommendable tenor versions, notably Peter Schreier (Decca, 5/91^R), Ian Bostridge (Hyperion, 4/96) and Werner Güra (Harmonia Mundi, 2/00), this is simply a non-starter.

Richard Wigmore

Schubert

Winterreise, D911

Christopher Maltman *bar* Graham Johnson *pf*
Wigmore Hall Live (M) WHLIVE0046 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live, February 11, 2010



A British baritone's *Winterreise*, with some transpositions

Tenor or baritone? A matter of taste; but I've always felt that, whereas the puppyish enthusiasm of *Die schöne Müllerin* is best suited to the tenor voice, the despair of *Winterreise* requires the darker tones of a baritone. Moreover, Schubert's friend Vogl, the leading interpreter of his songs, was a baritone. Second question: at what pitch? Christopher Maltman sings 10 songs in the original key, the rest being transposed: four down by a semitone, seven by a tone, three by a minor third. This inconsistency leads to unfortunate results: 'Der Lindenbaum', 'Wasserflut' and 'Auf dem Flusse', three consecutive songs, are all in E, major or minor, but Maltman sings the latter two down a tone.

On the other hand, there are respectable precedents: with a few exceptions (three in 1962 for EMI, four in 1971 for DG), Fischer-

Dieskau followed the same pattern. And Maltman has a light, tenorish baritone, which accords with what we know of Vogl's, so where does that leave us? The short answer is that this is a rather lightweight account of the protagonist's winter journey. When Maltman essays a *mezza voce*, his tone whitens; and sometimes, as in 'Die Nebensonnen', he sounds uncomfortable in the original key.

But these drawbacks are outweighed by the beauty of Maltman's voice and his keen attention to the words: whispered phrases in 'Auf dem Flusse', an expressive 'müde' ('tired') in 'Das Wirtshaus'. His *crescendo* on the last word of all, to match the *forte* phrase in the piano, is a brilliant touch. Admirable accompanist, excellent sound: well worth hearing.

Richard Lawrence

Thommessen

Veslemøy synsk

Marianne Beate Kielland *mez*

Nils Anders Mortensen *pf*

Lindberg Lyd (E) (3) (2 SACDs + Blu-ray Disc)
SACD2L-078SABD (124' • DDD/DSD • DTS-HD MA)



A Grieg song-cycle, expanded to epic proportions

Arne Garborg's epic poem-cycle *Haugtussa* ('The Maid from under the Mountain') is a classic of Norwegian literature, its four volumes covering a vast panoply of human and supernatural interaction, concentrated on the heroine Veslemøy synsk ('far-sighted Veslemøy' or 'Veslemøy the seer'). Love, betrayal, self-sacrifice, redemption, lust, creatures from the underworld and ultimate forgiveness rub shoulders vividly through its pages like a fusion of the Eddas, *Peer Gynt*, the folk-ballad *Draumkvædet* and the *Divine Comedy*. If that sounds unfamiliar from the world of Grieg's wonderful nine-song cycle, this is because the master of Bergen concentrated on just the strand of Veslemøy's doomed love for Jon, omitting the wider contexts of Garborg's extraordinary conception.

As Thommessen writes in the booklet, Grieg 'had enough material to complete a larger work based on the cycle; I have just taken the liberty of doing the work for him'. The result is four times the size of Grieg's cycle, a two-hour cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano (not an opera, as frequently listed on online retail sites that should know better) comprising 44 songs and a virtuoso piano cadenza (disc 2 tr 15), though the writing is incredibly demanding for both performers throughout. The musical language is a challenging collage, Thommessen using almost Grieg's entire oeuvre from *Haugtussa* to the Opp 13 and 45 sonatas

TUNE SURFING

American orchestras and labels online, and a fine Boston podcast



Orchestras online

For several years now, the New York Philharmonic has been selling digital downloads of its programmes through iTunes – by subscription only during the season, and later as individual concerts. It's a valuable resource, certainly, though not an inexpensive one: each concert costs as much as a full-price CD download. For those watching their wallets, the Minnesota Orchestra offers a smaller-scale 'season pass' subscription at a significantly lower cost – one can also purchase single works for a little more than a dollar each. Osmo Vänskä's pliant and passionate performances of Brahms's Fourth Symphony and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* are especially impressive but the cream of the crop is Vänskä's long-breathed yet emotionally taut account of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony. The orchestra plays gloriously (the brass have real stamina) and the recorded sound is very good – spacious and clear. The 256kbps MP3 files can be purchased at: minnesotaorchestra.org/listen/music-on-demand

Shostakovich on Cedille

Cedille, one of the US's most reliably rewarding independent labels, now has its own online shop: cedillerecords.org/music/index.php The Chicago-based company's entire catalogue is available in both 256kbps MP3 and 16-bit FLAC format; more recent releases are also available as 24-bit FLAC files. I was bowled over by the first instalment of a new Shostakovich cycle by the Pacifica Quartet – Nos 5-8, cleverly coupled with Myaskovsky's gorgeous Quartet No 13 – gutsy performances, beautifully recorded. A generous 1993 collection of Vivaldi concertos featuring former Chicago Symphony principal oboist Alex Klein is also not to be missed.

Vintage podcast

One of the oldest classical podcasts remains among the best: 'The Concert', from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, has been going strong since 1997. Recent programmes include a recital by rising-star violinist Caroline Goulding, a selection of Kodály's chamber works by Musicians from Marlboro, and Jeremy Denk playing Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. One can subscribe through iTunes or download directly through the museum's website: gardnermuseum.org/music/listen/podcasts
Andrew Farach-Colton

and Piano Concerto for raw material, yet set in a recognisably postmodernist harmonic framework (I won't spoil your fun spotting the quotes but there is a crib-sheet on page 11).

Marianne Beate Kielland sings, and occasionally speaks and wails, superbly throughout, catching the ardour of Veslemøy's love for Jon (songs 16-21) as beautifully as she portrays the heroine's slow descent towards the Underworld. This is a nightmarish dream-sequence finally entered in song 34, precipitated by her distress at Jon's wedding to another, two songs before. The radiance of the final pair of songs is entrancing. Mortensen proves a fine partner (and more than a 'mere' accompanist), supporting Kielland and exposing Thommessen's intricate musical web with great clarity. 2L's sound quality is superb and the set comes with a Blu-ray film of the whole. But this is music to be heard and relished in the imagination. Hugely recommended.

Guy Rickards

Weir

Ascending into Heaven. a blue true deam of sky. Drop down, ye heavens, from above. Ettrick Banks. Illuminare. Jerusalem. little tree. Love bade me welcome. Madrigal. My Guardian Angel. Psalm 48. Two Human Hymns. Vertue. Wild Mossy Mountains **Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge / Geoffrey Webber with Matthew Fletcher, Annie Lydford** *org*
Delphian © DCD34095 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Judith Weir's eclectic settings: from psalms to ee cummings

For an aural snapshot of the distinctive Weir style I recommend track 11, a less-than-four-minute setting of a sonnet by ee cummings ('a blue true dream of sky') in which the poem's skilful way with new angles on verbal conventions is perfectly matched by the music's gently exotic use of consonance and melodic ornament.

As several of the items on this disc illustrate, Judith Weir has always been well able to conform to the conventions of, say, the King's College Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols without losing all sense of identity and purpose in the process. Sometimes, as with the second of the *Two Human Hymns*, what in itself sounds like straightforward, slightly foursquare choral writing is offset – even estranged – by an elaborately patterned organ part. Even more beguiling is the use of a marimba to interact with the voices in three further cummings settings, *little tree*, and, at the other extreme, the appearance of a bold-as-brass trombone as counterpoint to the choir's chanting of Psalm 148. The

Gonville & Caius College Choir sounds suitably youthful, sometimes with an artless edge to the soprano line that does no damage at all to Weir's expressive world. The recording was made in Jesus College Chapel, not quite on home ground, and in one or two tracks I felt that a less spacious acoustic might be even better suited to such intimate and subtle vocal writing. The undeniable advantage is provided by the new (2007) Jesus College organ, whose rumbling basses and raw, reedy tone colours are ideal for *Wild Mossy Mountains* and *Ettrick Banks*.

Arnold Whittall

Wilby

'Heaven in Ordinarie'
Introit, 'Companions of the Lord'. Psalm 24, 'The Earth is the Lord's'. Magnificat. Nunc dimittis. Ave Maria. Recessional on 'Michael'. Two Choral Prayers. Two Wedding Anthems. A Passion for Our Times – Organ Prelude. Prelude, Fugue and Toccata **Exon Singers / Matthew Owens** with **Jeffrey Makinson** *org*
Regent © REGCD338 (64' • DDD)



A versatile composer turns his hand to Anglican repertoire

Philip Wilby's versatility as a composer has encompassed all forms of instrumental and vocal music but he's particularly renowned for his brass band repertoire and choral works. His success lies in his ability to write attractive melodic lines which combine to produce rich chordal textures, plus harmony which has a luminous quality worthy of Herbert Howells. Also, his intelligent and sensitive response to familiar texts from the Anglican liturgy will gladden the hearts and minds of church musicians at both cathedral and parish church level.

Like Howells and Britten, Wilby is skilled at composing to order for specific buildings and choirs. With the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* for St Paul's Cathedral the result is the most adventurous composition on this disc, with the chanting vocal phrases combined with organ arabesques in the manner of MacMillan, Messiaen and Tippett. Elsewhere, the harmonic language has an unashamed warmth, especially in the *Two Choral Prayers* and *Two Wedding Anthems*, while the *Ave Maria* is as beautiful a setting as you'll hear from other composers.

In contrast, Wilby's organ music has spiky dissonances, typical of the neo-classical style of the 1960s and '70s. The predominantly heavy mid-19th-century sound of the Wells Cathedral organ isn't ideal for this repertoire but organist Jeffrey Makinson plays with superb brilliance, both as soloist and accompanist. The committed, expressive singing of the Exon Singers under the

inspired direction of Matthew Owens will delight listeners as surely as it must have pleased the composer. A rewarding and enjoyable CD, both for church musicians and for lovers of the Anglican repertoire.

Christopher Nickol

'Baroque Duets'

Cavalli Calisto – Vivo per te pietosa...Dolcissimi baci. L'Ormindo – De'nostri abeti...Amo Erisbe, amo Ormindo; Acts 3, Prison scene **Handel** Alcina – Verdi prati. Alexander Balus – Calm thou my soul...Convey me to some peaceful shore. Giulio Cesare – Son nata a lagrimar. Susanna – When thou art nigh, my pulse beats high. Theodora – To thee, thou glorious son of worth. Caro autor di mia doglia, HWV182b **Monteverdi** L'incoronazione di Poppea – Pur ti miro **Steffani** La libertà contenta – Volate, momenti **Fiona Campbell** *mez* **David Walker** *counterten*
Ironwood / Neal Peres Da Costa
Vexations840 © 840 1101 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Evidence of the burgeoning Australian Baroque scene

In recent years the Australian Baroque music scene has accelerated, largely thanks to organisations such as Pinchgut Opera and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. On this evidence Ironwood (founded in 2006) is another capable group, which is not surprising because its core players include half of the original co-founders of Florilegium – cellist Daniel Yeadon and harpsichordist Neal Peres Da Costa. Costa's pacing is flawless throughout this survey of diverse Baroque duets stretching from the 1640s up to the 1750s. Ironwood's playing conveys sweetly satisfying rhetoric, whether it is the melancholic string ritornellos during the substantial prison scene from Act 3 of Cavalli's *L'Ormindo* or the bittersweet bassoon-led beauty of 'To thee, thou glorious son of worth' from *Theodora*. Recordings make a subtle appearance in a jolly duet from Steffani's *La libertà contenta*.

Fiona Campbell and David Walker's intuitive duet-singing is nicely blended and responsive. They do full justice to the tragic intimacy of Cornelia and Sesto's 'Son nata a lagrimar' (*Giulio Cesare*), for which Ironwood's accompaniment captures a lovely flowing pulse, and two dissimilar duets from Handel's late English oratorios rightly sound an aesthetic world apart from Cavalli. Each singer also cuts loose on an aria: Walker interprets 'Verdi prati' (*Alcina*) tenderly, and Campbell sings 'Convey me to some peaceful shore' (*Alexander Balus*) with gentle pathos. Handelian collectors may be intrigued to hear the apparent premiere recording of the revised version of the sensual duet 'Caro autor di mia doglia' that Handel prepared for two altos in about 1742 (HWV182b). **David Vickers**

'Chamber Vespers'

Banchieri Dixit Dominus. **Magnificat** **Cazzati** Regina caeli **Cima** Sonata per cornetto **Crotti** [Sonata sopra] Sancta Maria **Finetti** Laudate pueri **Frescobaldi** Canzon terza per basso solo. Capriccio sopra un soggetto **Monferrato** Lauda Jerusalem **Petrobelli** Laetatus sum **Piccinini** Toccata quarta **Sances** Ave maris stella **Tarditi** Domine ad adiuvandum. Nisi Dominus **Gonzaga Band** with **Clare Wilkinson** *mez* **Gawain Glenton** *cornetts* Chandos Chaconne © CHAN0782 (62' • DDD • T/t)



A potpourri of Vespers and instrumental music

As Jamie Savan, founder of the Gonzaga Band, points out in his excellent notes, cash-strapped Italian churches and cathedrals could rarely muster the forces required by works such as Monteverdi's *Vespers* of 1610. Chamber settings for a handful of instrumentalists and one or two solo voices were the norm. Without seeking to recreate a specific 17th-century Vespers service, à la Paul McCreeh, Savan has devised an enterprising programme that interleaves the Vespers music – the opening versicle, the five psalms, the hymn *Ave maris stella* and the *Magnificat* – with aptly chosen instrumental works.

Frescobaldi and Banchieri apart, the assorted monks, organists and *maestri di cappella* represented here range from the shadowy to the totally obscure. While some of the music might be dubbed agreeable Monteverdi-lite, there are some delightful discoveries: Tarditi's exuberant *Domine ad adiuvandum*, for instance, with its juicy false relations, or Petrobelli's *Laetatus sum*, conceived as a sacred operatic scena. Finest of all, perhaps, is Banchieri's *Magnificat*, with its alternation of plainchant and expressively harmonised verses, and its rollicking final 'Alleluja'.

Congregations in 17th-century Ancona or Bologna would have been lucky indeed to hear instrumental playing remotely as vivid as the Gonzaga Band's. Savan and Gawain Glenton are cornettists of flair and subtlety, while Steven Devine and Richard Sweeney nicely balance capricious flexibility and forward momentum in Frescobaldi's Canzon and fugal Capriccio. The ubiquitous dancing triple-time rhythms in the Vespers settings are always alive and supple, avoiding the trap of over-accentuation. If both singers could have wrung more drama from the words, their pure, instrumental timbres (blending perfectly with each other, and with the cornetts), delicacy and easy agility are invariably beguiling. Once or twice – I'm thinking especially of Crotti's *Sancta Maria* – the cornetts can outgun Faye Newton's

bell-like soprano. Otherwise no complaints about the balance, or the ideally sympathetic acoustic of St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead. **Richard Wigmore**

'Ecuador Baroque'

'Una tonadilla nueva!' **Anonymous** Oy nuestra reyna del cielo. Muy hermosa es María. Una tonadilla nueva. Sagales a prisa. Atención a la fragua amorosa. Canción de un negro al Niño Dios. Curi muyito. El negro José. Oygan que da. Ese viril con pan. Tono triste para oración. Canción de una pastorita al Niño Dios **Blasco** Lachacona me piden, vaya. De uno en uno vayan entrando. Ventezillo traviesso **GF Hidalgo** Salve regina **Hortuño** Vamos todos a ver **Pillajo** Al sol de la tierra y el cielo **Ensemble Villancico** / **Peter Pontvik** CPO © CPO777 568-2 (51' • DDD • T)



Southern-hemisphere Baroque from Quito and beyond

A year or so ago I reviewed Hespèren XXI's exploration of Latin American music in the 18th century (A/10) and was charmed by its mix of Old and New worlds. A similar intention animates this surprising recording by the Swedish Ensemble Villancico, which draws on the recent research of a number of scholars and musicians. As often happened throughout Latin America, not a few local composers were of indigenous origin, even early on. For the most part, although the texts set are sacred, the musical style is usually reminiscent of the dance rhythms and jaunty melodies of the country's popular traditions. None the less, several pieces here are cast in the familiar *villancico* form and are written for double choir, testifying to the accomplishment of these composers and their successful integration of local and imported idioms; and there's also a *cappella* singing of the sort associated with the church music of the Old World, in the shape of a *Salve regina* setting by the Bogotá composer Gutierre Fernández Hidalgo, who worked in Quito early in the 17th century.

As one might expect, Ensemble Villancico combine voices and instruments, with percussion, plucked strings and a degree of judicious arranging featuring prominently. Only the ending, with its drones, chimes and a faint air of beads and bangles harks back strangely to a more familiar, recent past. One hesitates to use the loaded term 'exotic', particularly as such ventures are no longer unfamiliar; but to the extent that this particular repertoire is unfamiliar still, one could not hope for a more engaging introduction. **Fabrice Fitch**

'From the Old World to the New'

Brahms Zwei Gesänge, Op 91 **Bridge** Three Songs for Voice, Viola and Piano. Two Pieces for Viola and Piano **Copland** Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson **Loeffler** Quatre Poèmes, Op 5 **Karina Lucas** *mez* **Rebecca Jones** *va* **Simon Lane** *pf* Sonimage © SON111011 (76' • DDD)



Debut recital from a British mezzo embraces old and new

Karina Lucas, a young British singer new to me, and her instrumental accomplices offer an imaginative, offbeat programme framing assuaging viola songs by Brahms and Frank Bridge with more abrasive fare from the New World: the *Quatre Poèmes* of Alsace-born, Debussy-influenced American Charles Martin Loeffler and Copland's eclectically inspired settings of Emily Dickinson. Although her tangy light mezzo can grow a tad strident under pressure, Lucas vividly catches the varied moods of the Loeffler songs. In the Baudelairean spleen of 'La cloche fêlée' she reduces her tone to a disembodied thread for the mournful final pages, while she and her colleagues tear gleefully into the ebullient Verlaine setting 'Dansons la gigue!', where the jig morphs into a Highland fling.

Pleasantly as she sings the Brahms songs, Lucas is no match for, say, Anne Sofie von Otter (DG, 4/91) in Brahmsian *Innigkeit*. With tempi pushed forward determinedly, her manner strikes me as too plain and extrovert. Nor is her German diction always idiomatic. Lucas sounds much more at home in her native language, whether in the twilit melancholy of the early Bridge songs, voice, viola and piano in musing colloquy, or the strange visions and reveries of Copland's Emily Dickinson cycle. In tandem with the rhythmically acute Simon Lane, she catches alike the tender innocence of 'Nature', the quizzical playfulness of 'Dear March, come in!' and 'Going to Heaven', and the heavy foreboding of 'I felt a funeral in my brain', with its churning, tolling accompaniment. If sustained high notes can become squally, Lucas's soft singing is always affecting, not least at the rapt close of 'The Chariot'. For all my provisos, this is certainly a debut recital worth hearing, its attractions enhanced by duskily impassioned performances of two rare early Bridge miniatures for viola and piano.

Richard Wigmore

'In the Beginning'

Copland In the beginning" **Gombert** Lugebat David Absalon **Holst** Nunc dimittis **G Jackson** In the beginning was the word **Lukaszewski** Nunc dimittis **Palestrina** Nunc dimittis **Weelkes** When David heard **Whitacre** When David heard

Bold performances:
Paul Agnew leads
Les Arts Florissants



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^aBeth Mackay *mez* Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Peter Phillips, Benjamin Nicholas with Natasha Tyrwhitt-Drake *org*
Delphian © DCD34072 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Young Oxford choir's debut spans three centuries of music

The Choir of Merton College, Oxford, was founded in 2008 and this debut CD will undoubtedly establish them as one of the UK's finest choral ensembles. Listening to their superb performances and seamless blending of voices, it's hard to believe that the choir is only four years old. They have a vast range of dynamics and vocal colouring, and they're fully responsive to the different styles of the 16th- and 17th-century polyphonic compositions and the rich chordal textures of the 20th- and 21st-century pieces. I'm sure this is the happy outcome of having joint directors of music, and the skill and experience of both Peter Phillips and Benjamin Nicholas bring out the best from their singers.

The imaginative programme explores beginnings, as heard in the famous opening words of the Book of Genesis and St John's Gospel, and endings, represented by the words of the *Nunc dimittis* plus the story of the murder of King David's son Absalom. Despite the gap of three centuries, the compositions of Gombert, Palestrina and Weelkes sit comfortably with the modern

works, and the serene polyphony of the early music repertoire is every bit as expressive as the sumptuous harmonies of the pieces by Holst, Łukaszewski and Whitacre. Merton College deserve our gratitude for commissioning Gabriel Jackson's *In the beginning*, a marvellous setting of familiar words, much enhanced by the descriptive accompaniment of organist Natasha Tyrwhitt-Drake. Beth Mackay is an excellent soloist in Copland's mini-oratorio and her bold, declamatory singing is ideally suited to the words from Genesis. An intensely moving recording, strongly recommended.

Christopher Nickol

'Lamentazione'

D Scarlatti *Stabat mater* a 10 Lotti *Crucifixus* a 10
Legrenzi *Quam amarum est, Maria* Caldara
Crucifixus a 10 Leo *Miserere* a due cori
Lotti *Crucifixus* a 8

Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew
Virgin Classics © 070907-2 (56' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Abbaye d'Ambronay,
September 2010



Les Arts Florissants delve into the Baroque stile antico

The logo of Les Arts Florissants incorporates its customary 'William Christie' but this concert at the historic abbey in Ambronay was devised and directed by Paul Agnew, whose perceptive programme explores Italian

Baroque sacred music composed in the *stile antico*. It places renowned masterpieces such as Domenico Scarlatti's 10-part *Stabat mater*, Leonardo Leo's double-choir *Miserere* and Antonio Lotti's popular eight-part *Crucifixus* in context alongside music by Antonio Caldara and Giovanni Legrenzi, and another less familiar *Crucifixus* setting by Lotti. The concept also represents the trinity of major Italian musical cities: the two most substantial pieces represent Naples (Leo) and Rome (Scarlatti), whereas Legrenzi, Lotti and Caldara had roots in Venice.

The doleful phrases that commence Scarlatti's *Stabat mater* are shaped fluidly by 20 singers (two per part). Regardless of occasional flaws inevitable from a live recording, textural transparencies resonate around the lovely Ambronay acoustic. The Choir of Les Arts Florissants is on exceptionally good form, even if its handling of vivid virtuoso passages such as 'Inflammatu et accensus' and the Amen suggests that single-voice interpretations sometimes enjoy an advantage (eg *Concerto Italiano* or *Vox Luminis*). Agnew's singers are impressive in Caldara's short 16-part *Crucifixus* and sopranos Hannah Morrison and Maud Gnizdaz take things down several notches for their sensitive performance of Legrenzi's duet *Quam amarum est, Maria*. At the other end of the spectrum, Leo's *Miserere* (1739) is sung with the boldness, authority, lamentation and soft compassion that the

composer variously demands. This magnificent music made a strong impression upon Wagner during Holy Week at Naples in 1880 but it has not been recorded as often as it deserves; there was one notorious case when Decca used it as the title of an album of Leo's music that it wasn't even on. Agnew and his choir deserve plaudits for a masterly and valuable recording. **David Vickers**

'Songs of Farewell'

RR Bennett A Good-Night **Elgar** They are at rest
WH Harris Bring us, O Lord God **Holst** The Evening-Watch, Op 43 No 1 **Howells** Take him, earth, for cherishing **Parry** Songs of Farewell **Sullivan** The long day closes (arr P Lawson) **Tavener** Funeral Ikos **Vaughan Williams** Rest. The Turtle Dove **Tenebrae** / **Nigel Short**
Signum © SIGCD267 (76) • DDD • T



A collection of valedictory songs, all heirs to Parry's style 'Scratch a French composer and underneath you'll find Massenet; scratch an English composer and you'll find Parry.' Parry's choral masterpieces, the six *Songs of Farewell*, composed between 1913 and 1915, represent a magnificent summation of his work as an English choral composer whose influence on several generations of native composers thereafter was immense. And this ravishing performance by *Tenebrae*, in the context of works by Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams, Harris and Howells, only serves to accentuate how deeply that influence was assimilated. In terms of sound and sensibility, I can think only of the recording made by Richard Marlow and the choir of Trinity College (Conifer, 9/87 – sadly nla), that rivals it.

Short gives wonderful shape to the well-known 'My soul there is a country' and extracts that essential longing from 'I know my soul hath power' (often the most ignored of the set), an emotion which is also abundant in the yearning refrain of 'Never weather-beaten sail', whose contrapuntal detail benefits from the moderate tempo. Even more imposing are the last three motets. The ethereal close of 'There is an old belief' is splendidly controlled dynamically, while the dramatic contrasts of Donne's 'At the round earth's imagined corners' are vividly recreated. Most impressive, however, is the fluidity of the double-choir motet, 'Lord, let me know mine end', the textural clarity and emotional intensity of that fairly summarises the complexity of the composer's heterodoxy. There are also lovely performances of Harris's *Bring us, O Lord God* and Howells's *Take him, earth, for cherishing*, and a rare recording of Vaughan Williams's *Rest*, all heirs to the tradition of Parry's art.

Jeremy Dibble

'Treasures of Christ Church'

Britten A Shepherd's Carol **Byrd** O Lord, make thy servant, Elizabeth our Queen **Darlington** Jacob's Ladder **Gibbons** Great Lord of Lords **Goodall** Veni, Sancte Spiritus **Grier** My breath lies quiet **Handel** Zadok the Priest **Howells** Like as the hart **Parsons** Ave Maria **Purcell** O God, thou art my God **Rutter** Canticle of the Heavenly City **Tallis** Salvator mundi **Tavener** The Lord's Prayer **Tavener** Christe Jesu **Walton** Set me as a seal **Warlock** Bethlehem Down **Weelkes** Hosanna to the Son of David

Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford / Stephen Darlington

Avie © AV2215 (69) • DDD • T/T



Music with deep links to its Oxford college performers

Every composition on this disc has a strong connection with Christ Church, Oxford, and the programme includes works by directors of music (Darlington, Grier and Tavener), college undergraduates (WH Auden and Walton) plus newly commissioned works from Goodall, Rutter and Tavener. Other pieces exist in manuscript copies housed in the college library, including Handel's own organ arrangement of the accompaniment to *Zadok the Priest*. The disc is a veritable treasure trove of music in varied styles together with sacred texts and 20th-century poems.

Thanks to numerous LPs and CDs, the wonderful singing of the Christ Church Cathedral Choir can be regarded as another treasure, and on this latest recording they give consistently outstanding performances under the committed direction of Stephen Darlington. The lower adult voices have as much dynamic strength and colour as the trebles, resulting in satisfying polyphonic textures in the early music and sonorous chordal harmonies in the more recent compositions. The overall sound of the choir has an unforced elegance with a seamless *legato*; a delight to listen to. Excellent solo singers contribute to the works by Britten, Darlington, Gibbons, Purcell and Rutter, and the cathedral's sub-organist Clive Driskill-Smith gives stylish and sympathetic accompaniments in the pieces by Gibbons, Grier, Handel, Howells and Purcell. Flautists Claire Wickes and Alex Leese plus harpist Rachel Wick provide a beautiful accompaniment in Rutter's lovely *Canticle of the Heavenly City* – one of his finest and most moving compositions.

A very enjoyable CD, thanks to the rewarding choice of music and the magnificent performances of all the singers and instrumentalists; a recording to treasure.

Christopher Nickol

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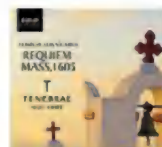
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Ralf Otto and his Mainz forces champion WF Bach

Had Johann Sebastian contributed no more to music than the four composers he fathered, one might still claim the Bachs as the most remarkable family in Western music. Proof is in this recent spate of recordings, which spans three generations, near enough (four if you count the recording devoted to Johann Christoph, reviewed on page 84), and doesn't even include the most successful of Bach's sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel.

The reissues here are worth celebrating as much as the new recordings: 20 years ago, **Hermann Max** curated several discs with the Rheinische Kantorei and Das Kleine Konzert which have stood the test of time. Three of these, now reissued as a set, were devoted to Johann Ludwig, whose cantatas were often performed by Sebastian in Leipzig. His motets are an instructive counterpart to those of his famous cousin, but the most impressive work is the *Trauermusik*, which, curiously like Schütz's *Musicalisches Exequien*, is in three parts. There's nothing particularly funereal about the music, which is scored for a full complement of winds and brass, but the dialogue between choir and soloists is very deftly executed. A similar level of sophistication is found with the least-known of Sebastian's sons, Johann Christoph Friedrich. His large-scale setting of Johann Gottfried Herder's 'Biblical painting' *The Childhood of Christ* sees yet another confident performance from the incomparable Barbara Schlick and from Harry van der Kamp.

Friedrich seems to have retained a greater share of his father's aesthetic, albeit through the intermediary of his elder brother Emanuel: his setting of the famous chorale *Wachet auf* is very impressive, looking at once back and, uncannily enough, forward to the 'Bach revival' of the next century.

But the most impressive of Das Kleine Konzert's reissues are those devoted to

'Most impressive are Wilhelm Friedemann's cantatas, which include some of the most affecting arias I've ever listened to'

Friedemann's cantatas, which include some of the most affecting arias I've ever listened to. Apart from Schlick, who's worth listening to on her own, the instrumentalists also shine, for Friedemann's writing for solo organ, oboe, or flute alone or in pairs,

is exquisitely sensitive (not a phrase I'd use often). Carus has brought out two further cantata volumes as part of an extended series devoted to Sebastian's eldest son. The first comprises the audio track of a very fine DVD I reviewed earlier this year (3/11), under the direction of **Ralf Otto**. Even without the opulent visuals afforded the DVDs, these works make a splendid impression, with horn parts of great verve and zestful singing from the Mainz's Bachchor and a quartet of pretty evenly matched soloists. There's a Christmas theme to most of the texts, and the quality of the programme matches those of the Capriccio reissues: in fact Friedemann's choral numbers are, if anything, more impressive. Not quite so accomplished is the new offering from **Jürgen Ochs** and the Rastatter Hofkapelle, the soloists less assured, the choir less precise. In truth the composer himself isn't on top form: with the mercurial Friedemann, the difference between the sublime and the workaday is harder than usually difficult to pinpoint. That explains the mixed reception history he's been lumbered with, but also why, at his not infrequent best, he is the most surprising and inspired of all the Bachs. Except for you-know-who.

After so many brushes with sublimity, the music of Johann Christian Bach (the youngest of Bach's sons) comes across as accomplished but pedestrian, a perfect product of Padre Martini's finishing school. The funeral theme noted with Johann Ludwig continues with Christian's Requiem and *Miserere*, but these are music for a very different age, for which public mourning was, preferably, ostentatious. These works may have launched Christian's career but I have heard him far more inspired and inventive than he is here: the pathos feels laid-on, the affects assumed and clichéd. The RIAS Kammerchor and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin under **Hans-Christoph Rademann** do their best but struggle to bring emotion to music that confines itself to conventionalised expressions of sentiment. **G**

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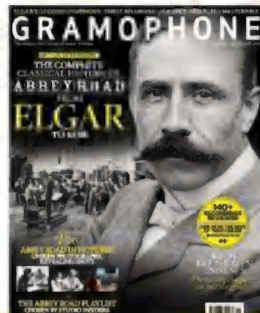
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Opera



Richard Lawrence reviews Handel's Alcina:

'Vessellina Kasarova begins phrase after phrase with a kind of bark. I kept wishing for Sarah Connolly' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 98**



Mike Ashman reviews the Copenhagen Tannhäuser:

'The acoustic does justice to the rich sound of the orchestra. The vocal achievements are about as good as it gets' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**

Beethoven

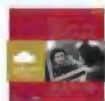
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Dresden, September 22, 1948

DVD: 'Mir ist so wunderbar!' - Das Grosse Haus



Out of the rubble of Dresden, a post-apocalyptic Fidelio

Amid the post-war rebuilding of Dresden, singing *Fidelio* was like performing a church service, says soprano Christel Goltz in the bonus DVD in this lavishly packaged Vol 2 of Profil's Semperoper Edition. Though makeshift *Fidelios* were heard as early as 1945 at a spa hotel in the Dresden suburbs, this stark, expressionist 1948 production opened the Staatstheater with an excellent cast that still reflected the cultivated values of pre-war Germany but had an extra post-war subtext that gave Beethoven's parable of political oppression an extraordinary level of musical engagement. Goltz, for one, uses some extravagant pre-war *portamento* with an electrifying effect that doesn't feel dated – and is rendered with astoundingly modern, warm, clear sound quality. Missing, though, are the opening ensemble, Leonore's great 'Abscheulicher' aria and the Prisoner's Chorus; apparently the tape was snipped so that parts of the opera could be broadcast individually, and not all of them survived.

The overture is vintage Joseph Keilberth with a lean, bristling sonority, the slow sections attenuated with an intensely lyrical line and climaxes that are long in the building but land perfectly on target. The booklet-notes say the performance isn't 100 per cent identified; Keilberth was considered politically

suspect at that time, wasn't mentioned during the broadcast, and thus the Overture was archived without his name attached. My ears, though, haven't the slightest doubt.

Vocally, the principal singers tend to be Wagnerites, which means that Goltz's Leonore, for all her dramatic commitment, isn't as tidy as we're now used to, while Bernd Aldenhoff's stentorian Florestan uses the language with authority but not nuance. The hugely effective Josef Herrmann had a great way of making a soft landing on a note that comes to a sharp peak – in keeping with the character. Commenting on the rest of the cast is hard when so much is missing. However, the 178-page booklet is stuffed with photos, logs and all sorts of memorabilia. The bonus DVD has interviews with many who were there, including soprano Lisa Otto. Though everything is in German without subtitles, newsreel footage of the finale and Keilberth filmed from the pit are plentiful compensation. **David Patrick Stearns**

Fall

Der fidele Bauer

Rupert Bergmann *bass-bar* **Lindoberer**
Robert Maszl *ten* **Vincenz**
Franz Suhrada *bar* **Mathaeus Scheichelroither**
Eugene Amesmann *ten* **Stefan**
Laura Scherwitzl *sop* **Annamiri**
Thomas Zisterer *bar* **Zopf, Horst**
Romana Noack *sop* **Friederike**
Chorus of the Lehár Festival; Franz Lehár Orchestra /
Vinzenz Praxmarer

CPO ② CPO777 591-2 (110' • DDD • S)



Leo Fall's operetta emerges from the shadow of Lehár

It's gratifying to find CPO looking beyond Lehár for 20th-century Viennese operettas. Hard on the heels of Oskar Nedbal's admirable *Die Winzerbraut*, CPO now offers this work by Leo Fall, who shared in the international success of Viennese operetta in the early 1900s but has since fallen unjustifiably into the shadow of Lehár and Kálmán. Operetta connoisseurs rate him highly – not least for his quirkily individual word-setting and the chamber textures of his orchestration.

Though Fall's major international success was perhaps with *Die Dollarprinzessin* and *Madame Pompadour*, *Der fidele Bauer* has remained popular in German-speaking countries. It tells of tensions that arise when a young man of peasant stock leaves his humble upbringing to study at university in Vienna, becomes a professor and then contracts a marriage into a higher social class. As for the score, rustic melodies alternate with rousing student choruses, and elegantly phrased arias with elaborately worked-out ensembles. The major tenor solos have proved rewarding material for the likes of Wunderlich and Domingo.

One may not get the same level of sophisticated vocalisation here but the performance from the 2010 Bad Ischl Festival is of a high standard and offers a proper sense of a genuine Viennese operetta ensemble. Principal honours are shared between tenors Eugene Amesmann and Robert Maszl, sopranos Romana Noack and Laura Scherwitzl, and comic baritone Franz Suhrada. This is, though, a stage performance for a German-speaking audience, and English-speaking listeners should be warned that there's lots of German dialect and no accompanying libretto or translation.

The curious omission of the vocal part of the introductory number is balanced by two interpolations. The first of these is an overture that Fall arranged on themes from operettas by Offenbach, Strauss, Millöcker and Sullivan, the second a beautiful number from Korngold's Fall completion *Rosen aus Florida*. Both are treasurable in themselves but incongruous here. One may thus get a more authentic version in a 1954 radio production on Cantus-Line (nla) but operetta lovers should enjoy hearing Fall's rewarding score in the superior sound quality here.

Andrew Lamb

Selected comparison:

Marszalek (CANT) 5 01260

Handel

Alcina

Anja Harteros *sop* **Alcina**
Vessellina Kasarova *mez* **Ruggiero**
Kristina Hammarström *mez* **Bradamante**

Benjamin Bruns *ten* **Oronte**
Veronica Cangemi *sop* **Morgana**
Alois Mühlbacher *treb* **Oberto**
Adam Plachetka *bass-bar* **Melisso**
Vienna State Ballet; Les Musiciens du Louvre –
Grenoble / Marc Minkowski
Stage director **Adrian Noble**

Video director **Matthias Leutzendorff**

ArtHaus Musik © 2 DVD 101 571; © 3 108 028
 (3h 25' + 46' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo,
 DD5.0 & DTS-HD MA • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Vienna State Opera, 2011
 Bonuses: Behind the scenes, interviews with
 production team and artists, backstage footage



A Viennese production casts Alcina as a play within a play

It's quite a surprise to find a Handel opera emanating from Vienna, albeit with a foreign orchestra and production team: respect to Dominique Meyer, the Staatsoper's new director. *Alcina* was the second wholly new opera that Handel staged in 1734–35 at Covent Garden, all the members of the cast except one having taken part in *Ariodante* three months earlier.

The forces at Covent Garden included a small chorus and a dance company. Handel took advantage of these exceptional facilities, and there is ballet in each of the three acts of *Alcina*. In this production, the interval comes in the middle of Act 2: two recitatives and one aria, Oronte's 'È un folle', are omitted, and the ritornello of a chorus discarded before the premiere (and recycled in the Organ Concerto, Op 4 No 4) introduces the second half.

Adrian Noble sets his production in a salon, where Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, is receiving her guests; they then perform the opera, the part of Alcina taken by the Duchess herself. It's a charming conceit, even if we know that Georgiana's heyday was long after Handel's time and that, for instance, the bearded figure of Melisso bears no resemblance to her friend Charles James Fox.

The illusion that we are watching an 18th-century amateur performance is enhanced by the continuo and obbligato players being placed onstage (but not, unfortunately, the horns in 'Sta nell'Ircana', which are insufficiently prominent). Conductor and orchestra are superb; so is Anja Harteros, who finds real depth in Alcina's passion for Ruggiero. After an effortful start in her opening aria, Veronica Cangemi is well on form in 'Credete al mio dolore'. Kristina Hammarström looks and sounds well as Bradamante. Sad to say, Vesselina Kasarova is deeply disappointing: she begins phrase after phrase with a kind of bark, and there are alarming gear changes. I kept wishing for Sarah Connolly!

Richard Lawrence

Rustic charm: Fall's
Der fidele Bauer



PHOTOGRAPHY: FOTOHOEFER AT

Holten

The Visit of the Royal Physician

Johan Reuter *bar* **Johann Friedrich Struensee**
Gert Henning-Jensen *ten* **King Christian VII**
Elisabeth Jansson *contr* **Queen Caroline Mathilde**
Sten Byriel *bass* **Ove Høegh-Guldberg**
Djina Mai-Mai *sop* **Bootee-Caterine**
Gitta-Maria Sjöberg *sop*
 **Queen Dowager Juliane Marie**

Chorus and Orchestra of Royal Danish Opera /

Bo Holten

Stage director **Peter Oskarson**

Video director **Uffe Borgwardt**

Dacapo © DVD 2 110408 (154' + 37' • NTSC • 4:3 •
 PCM stereo and DTS 5.1 • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opera House, Copenhagen,
 May 2009

Bonus features include interviews with Bo Holten, Eva
 Sommestad Holten, Johan Reuter, Elisabeth Jansson
 and Gert Henning-Jensen



A prize-winning novel is adapted for the opera stage

It is the age of Enlightenment but not yet of Revolution. Denmark has a teenage king, Christian VII, a troubled soul who prefers the fantasy frolics of court life to contemplating the harsh realities of his country, and the attentions of his mistress to those of his Queen (Caroline Mathilde, youngest sister of England's George III). Into this power vacuum, and eventually into his marital bed, comes a German physician, Johann Friedrich Struensee, with admirable reformist plans for his adopted country but also a fatal political naivety that leads, thanks also to his affair with Caroline Mathilde, to his downfall, torture and execution. Per Olov Enquist's

prize-winning novel of 1999 has been acclaimed for its dream-like elegance and avoidance of cliché. Those qualities are also prominent in the opera – Bo Holten's sixth – for which the Swedish novelist wrote the libretto. It was a considerable success on its Copenhagen premiere in 2009 and this excellently produced DVD brings it to a broader public. The cast, led by Johan Reuter as the Physician and Gert Henning-Jensen as the King, are uniformly strong and the staging is simple, effective and largely gimmick-free. Holten himself conducts with unobtrusive authority. Apart from some close-ups of sweaty faces and very occasional drifting off-mic, the filming leaves nothing to be desired.

Holten has gone to great lengths to achieve diversity of style without shallow opportunism and, more practically, to ensure that the voices are not swamped. His idiom – related to Strauss in its lyricism, to Stravinsky in its occasional touches of parody or grotesque and to late Nielsen in its undertone of austerity – is direct and accessible without ever straying into banality. Most striking of all, to me, is Struensee's monologue near the end of Act 1, where he senses his mission, and the music superbly articulates the mixture of noble intent and unease. This passage raised hopes – not entirely fulfilled – that the tragic denouement of Act 2 would build on it and clinch the drama. For all his subtlety and intelligence, Holten lacks the melodramatic edge of Peter Maxwell Davies (whose 1991 full-length ballet *Caroline Mathilde*, also composed for Copenhagen, presents parts of the same story). However, Holten has produced a serious, thought-provoking drama and as such it is not to be underestimated.

David Fanning

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Gramophone Classical Music Guide 2012

Korngold

Die tote Stadt

Stefan Vinke *ten* Paul
 Solveig Kringelborn *sop* Marietta
 Stephan Genz *bar* Frank
 Christa Mayer *mez* Brigitta
 Eleonore Marguerre *sop* Juliette
 Julia Oesch *mez* Lucienne
 Shi Yijie *ten* Victorin
 Mathias Schulz *ten* Count Albert
 Piccoli Cantori Veneziani; Chorus and Orchestra of La
 Fenice, Venice / Eliahu Inbal
 Stage director Pier Luigi Pizzi
 Video director Davide Mancini
 Dynamic 33625 (148' • NTSC • 16:9 •
 PCM stereo • 0 • s)
 Recorded live, January 2009

Korngold

Die tote Stadt

Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* Paul
 Tatiana Pavlovskaya *sop* Marietta
 Michael Nagy *bar* Frank
 Hedwig Fassbender *contr* Brigitta
 Anna Ryberg *sop* Juliette
 Jenny Carlstedt *mez* Lucienne
 Julian Prégardien *ten* Victorin
 Hans-Jürgen Lazar *ten* Count Albert
 Chorus and Children's Chorus of Frankfurt Opera;
 Frankfurt Opera and Museum Orchestra /
 Sebastian Weigle
 Oehms Classics ② OC948 (130' • DDD)
 Recorded live 2009



Korngold's Bruges dream-opera from Venice and Frankfurt

Both recent productions (2009) of Korngold's masterpiece testify to its continuing appeal to audiences and directors alike. The casting of the vocally demanding role of Paul is crucial to La Fenice (DVD) and Frankfurt Opera (CD), and both productions are fortunate in having an exceptionally fine tenor portraying the grief-stricken husband, whose dead wife Marie returns in a dream as Marietta, a dancer in a theatrical troupe visiting his home town of Bruges – the 'dead city' of the title.

In Pier Luigi Pizzi's production for La Fenice, the curtain rises on Marie's room, a monochrome shrine with dark shadows and shafts of light focusing on vases of white amaryllis. The lighting designer, Vincenzo Raponi, ensures that no expression goes unchecked on the faces of an uncommonly fine group of singers. Walkways at various angles restrict the dancers in the *commedia dell'arte* sequences, where the choreography seems somewhat cramped. The visual highlight comes during the second tableau, in a breathtaking transformation scene from the setting of Marie's room to the moonlit

rooftops and church steeple of Bruges, which circles into view. Stefan Vinke as Paul may have the frame of a bouncer but he is light on his feet and conveys both the depth of his loss and the elation of falling hopelessly in love with Marietta, the statuesque Solveig Kringelborn. She makes her second entrance as a vision in scarlet, very much the femme fatale, and although her character is essentially one-dimensional she makes Marietta almost human. Christa Mayer as Brigitte the comely housekeeper melts the heart with her confession to Frank, Paul's confidant, portrayed by Stephan Genz, whose singing is sincere and eloquent, as is his Frankfurt counterpart, Michael Nagy. The sound of both orchestras (Eliahu Inbal conducts in Venice) adds to the theatricality.

The Frankfurt performance has great depth and resonance. This is another faultlessly cast production with some outstanding singing from the lyric tenor Klaus Florian Vogt and the dramatic soprano Hedwig Fassbender. Their vivid word-painting and turn of phrase rivets the attention, with the orchestra led by Sebastian Weigle throwing themselves heart and soul into Korngold's score.

Adrian Edwards

Lehár

Friederike

Nicola Beller Carbone *sop* Friederike
 Yves Saelens *ten* Lenz
 Marius Brenciu *ten* Goethe
 Mirjam Neururer *sop* Salomea
 Marianne Crebassa *mez* Hortense
 Olivia Doray *sop* Liselotte
 Joanna Malewski *sop* Dorothée
 Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon National
 Orchestra / Lawrence Foster
 Accord ② 47642770 (102' • DDD)



Live version of a rarely heard Goethe-inspired Singpiel

Friederike is a curiosity among Lehár's works – not strictly an operetta but rather, as he deliberately termed it, a Singpiel or play with music. There are no swinging waltzes, the music being designed more to evoke the play's period. The principal character is the poet Goethe, and the story concerns his awakening of the love of an Alsatian pastor's young daughter who finally realises that she must give him up to his art. The score consists largely of solos and duets for the leading couple, with a few others for a secondary pair. Not least important is that many of the lyrics use Goethe's own poetry. That is so not only in the big Richard Tauber number 'O Mädchen, mein Mädchen' but, above all, in a setting of 'Heidenröslein' to add to those of Schubert and others. Since the work is seldom staged today, it was an imaginative choice for concert presentation at

Radio France's 2009 Montpellier Festival. The applause on this recording suggests that the audience fully appreciated it.

But was it worth preservation on CD? Alas, I fear not – certainly not considering the rival versions available. Lawrence Foster conducts lovingly and expansively, but sometimes with a hint of slackness. That characteristic is shared by Marius Brenciu, 2001 Cardiff Singer of the World, who is disappointingly underpowered in the Tauber role – conveying neither poetry nor passion. Moreover, Nicola Beller Carbone's soprano has a sharp edge that never suggests the innocent young girl.

Any semblance of residual passion is immediately dispelled with each appearance of a French narrator reading her linking text. Moreover, Montpellier evidently decided to cut costs by omitting the brief chorus of students – no major loss, but significant for losing us the words of Goethe's 'Mit Mädchen sich vertragen'. Unless you're allergic to sound effects (twittering birds, a bleating lamb) EMI's 1980 recording under Heinz Wallberg, with Adolf Dallapozza and Helen Donath in leading roles, is altogether superior, and if you insist on a modern digital recording there's a fine 2009 issue from CPO (CPO777 330-2). This newcomer seems to me a complete non-starter.

Andrew Lamb

Mozart

The Magic Flute (sung in English)

Matthew Polenzani *ten* Tamino
 Ying Huang *sop* Pamina
 Erika Miklósa *sop* Queen of the Night
 Nathan Gunn *bar* Papageno
 Jennifer Aylmer *sop* Papagena
 René Pape *bass* Sarastro
 David Pittsinger *bass-bar* Speaker
 Greg Fedderly *ten* Monostatos
 Wendy Bryn Harmer *sop* Kate Lindsey,
 Tamara Mumford *mezs* Three Ladies
 Brian Davis *bar* First Priest
 Tony Stevenson *ten* Second Priest
 Michael Myers *ten* First Armed Man
 Robert Lloyd *bass* Second Armed Man
 Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera,
 New York / James Levine

Stage director Julie Taymor
 Video director Gary Halvorson

Sony Classical 88697 91013-9
 (112' • NTSC • 16:9 • LPCM stereo & DTS 5.1 • 0 • s)
 Recorded live at the Metropolitan Opera House,
 New York, 2006



Mozart's masonic masterpiece, abridged

This *Magic Flute*, which is performed in English, should come with a warning. You have to look closely at the back of the DVD case to learn that it is heavily, and indeed horribly, abridged. 'Bei Männern', the 'O Isis

und Osiris' chorus and the trio for Pamina, Tamino and Sarastro are omitted, as is Pamina's attempted suicide; there are cuts within numbers, such as the Portrait aria and the quintet 'Hm, Hm, Hm'. The Overture is butchered; another grievous loss is the chorale prelude for the Two Armed Men.

This version is aimed at children, presumably, and makes the cardinal error of underestimating their capacity to concentrate, understand and enjoy. Provided that the performance is engaging enough, that is: the sad thing is that this emasculated production is enchanting. There are no great voices – even René Pape seems out of sorts; and in the spoken dialogue his accent may remind you of Henry Kissinger, or perhaps Arnold Schwarzenegger, but the teamwork is excellent.

The best performance comes from Nathan Gunn as Papageno, with his irrepressible energy and sense of comic timing. Greg Fedderly as Monostatos is also well inside his part, though he plays it for laughs and under-emphasises the character's wicked side. Erika Miklósa as The Queen of the Night delivers her arias with impressive accuracy but is less than convincing in the dialogue. Matthew Polenzani and Ying Huang make a believably young pair of lovers.

The production is a visual delight, with its bright colours, puppets and masks. It is, predictably, entirely politically correct. James Levine's conducting is well-judged, save for a funeral 'Tamino mein!'. Give this to your children, then take them to the opera house.

Richard Lawrence

Puccini

La fanciulla del West

Daniela Dessi *sop* **Minnie**
Fabio Armiliato *ten* **Dick Johnson**
Lucio Gallo *bar* **Jack Rance**
Massimo La Guardia *ten* **Nick**
Andrea Patucelli *bass* **Ashby**
Marzio Giossi *bar* **Sonora**
Marco Voleri *ten* **Trin**
Orchestra and Chorus Citta Lirico / Alberto Veronesi
 Solo Voce © ② SV 8553212 (134' • DDD)



Daniela Dessi sings the golden girl in Puccini's Wild West tale

Any new recording of *Fanciulla* confronts the most troublesome opera of Puccini's maturity, though since this one is live, it's at least relieved of expectations of studio-standard atmospheric effects. Still, the wild west setting's rough-and-tumble language clashes strangely with the innate stylisation of operatically sung words, unlike the undiluted folk idioms Benjamin Britten used to create Americana in *Paul Bunyan*. *Fanciulla*'s one great tune – Andrew Lloyd Webber all but quoted it in *Phantom of the Opera* – is strangely confined mostly to the orchestra.

Even the big love duet has mostly declamatory vocal lines, suggesting that Puccini was searching for some sort of Americana language – and in 1910, before the mythology of the west was codified. Though Puccini heroines usually have a determined dramatic trajectory, here Minnie is curiously torn between out-toughing the men around her and wrestling with a crippling sense of feminine inadequacy as she falls in love with outlaw Dick Johnson. Vocally, near-Wagnerian amplitude is essential in the title role, but that quality can put the opera's intimacy out of reach.

This performance is one you'd happily encounter live (as this was in 2005). Casting is strong, the plain-Jane acoustic is clear, and stage noise is manageable. Nobody pretends that this is anything but an Italian opera. The drawing card is Daniela Dessi: her big, warm, Italianate voice clearly arises from the same gene pool as Renata Tebaldi's – a significant plus – though Dessi's vocal mileage is evident in Act 1 when gear shifts are audible. In the following two acts, though, language projection becomes paramount, allowing Dessi to make an excellent stab at revealing Minnie's inner life.

As Dick Johnson, tenor Fabio Armiliato hasn't any great vocal richness until he hits the upper reaches of his range in Acts 2 and 3. Lucio Gallo's few rough edges feel perfectly right for sheriff Jack Rance. The rest of the cast are vocally nondescript but dramatically alert. How far conductor Alberto Veronesi goes beyond good operatic traffic management is hard to say, given that the recording doesn't favour the orchestra. Among live recordings, the main alternative is the blazingly charismatic Eleanor Steber conducted by Dmitri Mitropoulos – though in 1954 sound quality.

David Patrick Stearns

Selected comparison

Mitropoulos (6/54) Walhall WLCD 0077

Verdi

Les vêpres siciliennes

Barbara Haveman *sop* **Duchess Hélène**
Burkhard Fritz *ten* **Henri**
Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester *bar* **Guy de Montfort**
Bálint Szabó *bass* **Jean Procida**
Livia Ághová *sop* **Ninetta**
Jeremy White *bass* **Le Sire de Béthune**
Christophe Fel *bass* **Le Comte de Vaudemont**
Fabrice Farina *ten* **Daniéli**
Hubert Francis *ten* **Thibault**
Roger Smeets *bar* **Robert**
Rudi de Vries *ten* **Mainfroid**
Chorus of the Netherlands Opera; Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra
 Opus Arte © ② DVD OA1060D; © ② OABD7092D
 (3h 28' + 24' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo & DTS 5.1 • 0 • s)
 Recorded live at the Amsterdam Music Theatre, September 2010. Extra features include Cast Gallery and introductory film



A rare outing for French grand opera on DVD

The Sicilian Vespers, like *Don Carlos*, was composed for the Paris Opéra. Like *Don Carlos*, too, it's better known in Italian translation; this production is sung in the original French. The staging and performance aren't ideal but it would be churlish not to salute the enterprise of the Netherlands Opera in reviving one of the least familiar of Verdi's middle-period operas.

The libretto is by Scribe, a recycled version of *Le Duc d'Albe* that he and a colleague had written for Halévy. The background – part fact, part fiction – is the hatred felt by the Sicilians for their overbearing French overlords, leading to a massacre for which the tolling of a bell for Vespers was the signal. There are clear echoes of Meyerbeer – *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète* – and Montfort, the tormented father, recalls Cardinal Brogni in Halévy's *La Juive*.

Christof Loy updates the setting to the 1940s. At the beginning, the French, dressed in dinner jackets, sing drunkenly of their homeland: projections of the Seine and the Eiffel Tower appear, drawing titters from the audience. During the Overture, displaced to Act 2, faces of the cast are shown. As you watch, passport-like solemnity gives way first to smiles, then to images of their childhood selves; and it's childhood scenes that replace the plot of 'The Four Seasons', the obligatory ballet required by the wretched Parisian taste for an irrelevant legshow. All right so far, but some will draw the line at Hélène heavily pregnant before her wedding, followed by Henri wheeling a pram.

Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester succeeds in evoking our sympathy in 'Au sein de la puissance'. The lovers sing tenderly; but what stands out in their Act 2 duet is some exquisite phrasing in the strings. Dramatic conviction is hampered by – how to put it? – Henri's less than heroic appearance. There are a few cuts, including the cabaletta of Procida's 'Et toi, Palerme', but it's a worthwhile addition to the modest number of French grand operas on DVD.

Richard Lawrence

Wagner

Parsifal

Falk Struckmann *bar* **Amfortas**
Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* **Parsifal**
Ante Jerkunica *bass* **Titurel**
Robert Holl *bass* **Gurnemanz**
Krister St Hill *bass* **Klingsor**
Katarina Dalayman *mez* **Kundry**
Brenden Gunnell *ten* **First Knight of the Grail**
Thilo Dahlmann *bass* **Second Knight of the Grail**
Julia Westendorp *sop* **First Squire**

Novelistic approach:
the Copenhagen
Tannhäuser



PHOTOGRAPHY: PER MORTEN ABRAHAMSEN

Cécile van de Sant *mez* Second Squire
Jeroen de Vaal *ten* Third Squire
Pascal Piltie *ten* Fourth Squire
Netherlands Radio Choir & State Male Choir Latvija
Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, / Jaap
van Zweden
Challenge Classics ④ ⑤ CC72519 (• DDD)



Wagner's Grail epic in a live concert performance

Something very striking happens during the orchestral transition to the final scene of the last act. It's a performance where the overall approach to the monumental score is basically cautious – as if all involved are concerned primarily to get through without mishap, and that offers as many examples of short-term expressive over-emphases as of rhythmic under-articulation – but which suddenly takes wing. There's a raw intensity and sense of expressive breadth about this portentous processional. And it serves as an ideal basis from which the three stages of the drama's conclusion – Amfortas's final lament, Parsifal's assumption of leadership, and the sublime choral-orchestral epilogue – can make an effect all the more powerful for the degree to which it differs from what has gone before.

This set is, I presume, the result of a single, concert-hall performance, recorded on December 10, 2010. The difference between such a relatively ad hoc affair and a seasoned stage production is obvious throughout; and although, as the accompanying DVD of extracts reveals, the solo singers with their music stands do manage a certain amount of dramatic interaction and response, the rather cramped platform setting is bound to underline the difference from any theatrical staging, however static. Robert Holl, who, as Gurnemanz, carries the main narrative burden of Acts 1 and 3, resorts to rather clipped articulation, as if to underline the importance

and nature of the words in an environment where no substantial visual clues to the dramatic action can be provided. Holl has abundant stamina, but musically he is rather put in the shade by singers whose parts give them more opportunity to project Wagner's well-shaped lines to strongly dramatic effect. Katarina Dalayman, Falk Struckmann and Klaus Florian Vogt do much to transcend the performance's oratorio-like ambience, though the sound-environment provided by conductor Jaap van Zweden, fluctuating between rather forced intensity and something much less incisive, is far from ideal, at least until that long-awaited gear change in Act 3. And much of the opera to that point seems to unfold at a lower dramatic temperature than usual.

While the 80-minute DVD of 10 extracts usefully provides visual evidence of the location and character of the performance as a whole, it seems distinctly casual as far as the editing goes: in particular, the omission of Act 1's last few bars is unfortunate. When played on normal domestic equipment, the SACD recording seems to restrict the space round the voices and flatten the acoustic perspective of the larger choral and orchestral episodes. However, the combined forces of the Netherlands Radio Choir and Latvian State Male Choir bring an appropriate weight of tone to a performance that certainly can't be accused of skating blithely over the great work's surface. There's room for a 118-page booklet in the box, but the opera's text is in German only.

Arnold Whittall

Wagner

Tannhäuser

Stig Andersen *ten* Tannhäuser
Tina Keberg *sop* Elisabeth
Susanne Resmark *mez* Venus
Tommi Hakala *bar* Wolfram
Stephen Milling *bass* Hermann
Chorus of the Royal Danish Opera; The Royal Danish

Orchestra / Friedemann Layer

Stage director Kasper Holten

Video director Uffe Bogrward

Decca ④ ⑤ DVD CATNO (OO' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Opera House, Copenhagen,
December 2009



After its acclaimed Ring comes the Copenhagen Tannhäuser

Using the same stage and video directors, ensemble and several of the same soloists, Decca/Royal Danish Opera's follow-up to their award-winning Ring DVDs takes on *Tannhäuser*. This opera's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* status in Wagner's output – he kept dabbling at it but never completed it to his satisfaction – makes it his hardest work to cast and stage well. Here Copenhagen's experienced bevy of 50-something singer/actors – Andersen, Kiberg, Resmark and Milling, with the slightly younger Hakala – positively feast on the vocal and acting opportunities offered by Holten's Ibsenesque ground production and Layer's expansive but never indulgent or over-modernised reading of the score's latest Vienna version (the booklet seems a little confused about this).

In revisiting the story-within-a-story aspect of his *Ring*, Holten's staging leans on Wagner's struggle to be the kind of novelistic artist he wanted to be while hindered by the confines of German court theatre. The action, costumed mid-19th century, is recreated throughout in the composing/writing room of Tannhäuser's mind. We see everything in 'correct' narrative flow – and no actual event is omitted – but none of it 'really' happens (except on the pages of script and score Tannhäuser is continually writing) save his own death next to that of his creation, the rival muse Elisabeth. Her rival is, of course, Venus, winningly played by Resmark as a kind of saucy Rosa Klebb spy on her author's life



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E&OE

and emotions. Again as in the *Ring* Holten shows well in directing intense emotions: the suffering of Elisabeth (Kiberg) after Tannhäuser's evocation, and the mental struggles of Andersen's hero throughout, are exemplars of clarity and concentration.

If you found Uffe Borgwardt's direction of his cameras in the *Ring* unconventional, there's no let-up here. We never just sit in the imaginary best seat in the stalls but see the action from every possible voyeuristic angle, extreme close-up to distant side shot. It's a dark staging but the colour schemes of designer Mia Stensgaard (cunning slashes of red on hair and clothes to cut through the prevailing blackness) seem well represented. What sounds like the theatre's spacious acoustic does justice to the rich (and again, dark) woody sound of the orchestra and Layer's well-planned layering of bigger climaxes, like the choral outcries of Act 2 and the 'redemption' ending. The vocal achievements are about as good as it gets in this opera. This new release takes its place comfortably alongside the more conservative Götz Friedrich / Colin Davis Bayreuth set (DG, 5/09, but showing its age in terms of filming technique) and the radical David Alden / Zubin Mehta Munich performance (Arthaus, 6/01). **Mike Ashman**

'Tragédiennes 3'

'Les héroïnes romantiques'

Berlioz Les Troyens - Entrée des constructeurs; Entrée des matelots; Entrée des laboureurs; Ah! je vais mourir...Adieu, fière cité **Gluck** Iphigénie en Tauride - Non, cet affreux devoir...Je t'implore et je tremble **Gossec** Thésée - Ah! faut-il me venger...Ma rivale triomphe **Kreutzer** Astyanax - Ah, ces perfides grecs...Dieux, à qui recourir **Massenet** Hérodiade - C'est Jean!...Ne me refuse pas **Méhul** Ariodant - Quelle fureur barbare!...Mais, que dis-je?-Ô des amants le plus fidèle **Mermet** Roland à Roncevaux - Prête à te fuir...Le soir pensive **Meyerbeer** Le Prophète - Ah, mon fils **Saint-Saëns** Henry VIII - Ô cruel souvenir!...Je ne te verrai jamais **Salieri** Les Danaïdes - Overture **Verdi** Don Carlos - Toi qui sus le néant des grandeurs de ce monde

Véronique Gens sop

Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset

Virgin Classics © 070927-2 (68' • DDD • T/T)



Gens's exploration of French romantic opera continues

Susan Graham says that all roads in the lyric mezzo repertoire lead to Dido in Berlioz's magnum opus, *Les Troyens*. The third volume of Veronique Gens's 'Tragédiennes' shows that many of those roads began with Gluck, who influenced *Les Troyens* greatly, as well as other composers who are barely known today. Thus, this Gluck-to-Verdi exploration of French opera arias (with some orchestra-only

interludes) begins in an odd, little-known netherworld with strong roots in the past (Baroque-era plots are still being recycled) but with Germanic orchestral writing that echoes Haydn's *Sturm und Drang* period and looks forwards to Weber's *Der Freischütz*. No doubt this music has been neglected partly because it's built on short, commonplace motifs that have a pithy intensity when played, as if a strong electrical current lies at its core – which is what happens here.

Méhul's *Ariodant*, a flop at its 1799 premiere but now considered among the composer's best, could pass for mature Gluck. And now that Gluck is returning to fashion, faux-Gluck is perfectly welcome. Gossec actually wrote ballet music for Gluck operas; you can tell in his 1782 *Thésée*, represented by a Medea revenge aria. Though Andromaque's aria from Kreutzer's 1801 *Astyanax* holds its own in a disc that also includes real Gluck as well as Dido's final scene in *Les Troyens*, the piece doesn't make me want to hear the whole opera. You know that you're in arcane territory, though, when the Méhul aria begins with a feverish melodrama that has Gens reciting spoken text with conductor Rousset handling the orchestral punctuation with a brisk tempo and medium-weight orchestral textures.

Once past Berlioz (for which Gens is nearly ideal, with the right weight of voice and use of language), the disc grows a bit less interesting. Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII* and Massenet's *Hérodiade* are represented by some dramatically diffuse scenes that show these second-rate composers at somewhat less than their peak. Perhaps because there's less a sense of reclamation from obscurity, performances feel less involved. Or maybe it's a matter of alternative involvement.

Gens's voice has grown into a fairly lush instrument that, at least in these studio conditions, is fully up to the tasks at hand. But one's main point of reference in the Massenet/Verdi repertoire comes from powerhouses such as Renée Fleming and Karita Mattila. Gens suggests that kind of amplitude is not needed, as the more sophisticated orchestral writing shoulders the expressive burden more equally with the vocal line. Perhaps the music doesn't require a vocal 'hard sell' that's become so customary you hardly realise it's there – until, as on this disc, it's refreshingly absent. I chose not to feel underwhelmed by the end of this recording. Artists this thoughtful often make more and more sense over repeated hearings.

David Patrick Stearns

'Wagner'

A film by **Tony Palmer**

Gono Multimedia © ③ DVD TP-DVD157

(7h 46' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 2 • S)

Recorded 1984



Tony Palmer's movie restored to full Wagnerian length

British director Tony Palmer has been making films about music and musicians since the late 1960s, his *idées fixes* ranging from Ginger Baker's drumming for Cream to Richard Wagner. Palmer's energies remain directed towards explaining to the layman the mysteries behind artists' biographies, or their creations, and the interview remains his favoured form for doing this. Even the heart of a feature film like *Wagner* – newly available in an original-length director's cut (just under eight hours) – is to be found when Richard Burton's intriguing, almost Brechtian assumption of the title-role speaks directly to camera.

Like a Meyerbeer opera, Wagner at full length is better than Wagner truncated. Charles Wood's storyline, running from the composer's Kapellmeister days in Dresden to his death, and linked by Andrew Cruickshank's skilfully understated narrations, unrolls at a pace that can better accommodate the many drop-in set pieces. Of these, by far the best are the most fictional (or should that be the most 'spun?'): Wagner's Hitler-like speech to the Vaterlandsverein, his proto-Jewishness in *Music* rant about Meyerbeer at a Zürich reception, his dropping of gold coins on Meyerbeer's head as the latter arrives for the Paris *Tannhäuser*, and the taking over the end of *Parsifal* from Hermann Levi with the dismissive 'you should be baptised'. Here Palmer and Wood are so right in spirit while playing free with detail that one wishes that there had been more like this.

Elsewhere, we get as much mountains and water in Vittorio Storaro's state-of-the-art landscape photography as the soundtrack (mostly under Solti) gives us the aggressive Nibelung music and the Fire music. It becomes a cultural equivalent of those business lectures that interpolate porn clips to keep the audience awake. There's also more than a dash of 'lurve' silliness – watchable only once – in the appearance of non-actors Sir William and Lady Walton as the royal family of Saxony, and the camping around of British acting knights Gielgud, Olivier and Richardson as Ludwig II's ministers. And facts are either very right (Beethoven's Seventh given with Wagner's own score emendations) or very wrong (the Paris *Tannhäuser* sung in German). None the less, if you don't take things too seriously – it's a movie, not a docu – enjoyment and increased curiosity about the subject matter is virtually guaranteed. Do try also to catch up with Carl Froehlich's 1913 silent *Wagner* and William Dieterle's comically compact 1956 *Magic Fire*, music 'arranged by' Korngold.

Mike Ashman



Philip Clark reviews the collected issues of music journal *Source*

'It's worth remembering what life was like back in the day for composers and musicians who chose to exist on the cultural margins'



Colin Anderson reviews writings about and drawings of Stravinsky

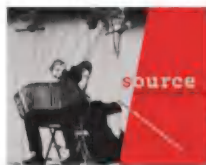
'The drawings capture in lively fashion his gnarled features and hunched frame, the result of spontaneous doodling'

Source – Music of the Avant-Garde, 1966-1973

Edited by Larry Austin and Douglas Kahn

University of California Press, PB, 381pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-520-26745-9



Between 1966 and 1973, a music journal called *Source*, operating

out of the University of California and edited by the composer Larry Austin, proposed some fresh thinking: it was a magazine about music that was also an invitation to make music, a place 'for communities and individuals to find each other,' says Douglas Kahn, co-editor of this newly published anthology of material from the *Source* vaults.

If Kahn's idea about what *Source* aimed to achieve feels like he's anticipating all that's great about the internet, it's worth remembering what life was like back in the day for composers and musicians who chose to exist on the cultural margins. Although John Cage, Morton Feldman, Frederic Rzewski, Steve Reich, Earle Brown, Gordon Mumma, Christian Wolff, Harry Partch, Philip Corner, Pauline Oliveros, David Tudor et al have now become respectable/respected figures/figureheads – sages endlessly mythologised in the case of Feldman and Cage, or with Reich, a one-man mainstream – in 1966 they were all considered reckless troublemakers bent on destroying music by those with a purchase on preserving the old ways. If *Source* was the *Morning Star*, the *Daily Telegraph* of contemporary music papers was *Perspectives of New Music*, which was still dealing with the fallout of aesthetic squabbles around Schoenberg and Stravinsky. *Source* wanted to move the argument on.

The aesthetic backbone of the publication was West Coast experimentalism, the New York School of composers and their affiliates, with occasional wildcards like the British sound poet Bob Cobbing and Fluxus supremo Nam June Paik thrown in to keep the frontier spirit alive and open-ended. Larry Austin, best known for Leonard Bernstein's 1965

recording of his *Improvisations for Orchestra and Jazz Soloists* and his later reconstruction of Ives's *Universe Symphony*, is an associate of Mills College and the San Francisco Tape Music Centre, where he encountered Terry Riley, Pauline Oliveros and another *Source* contributor, Robert Ashley, for the first time.

The SFTMC plundered emerging tape technology as a new compositional resource, and there's a similar air of *Source* deliberately pushing convention – print convention in particular – as conventionally through-written articles jostle for space against reproductions of scores, manifesto-like statements, photo essays, artworks, diagrams of newly invented instruments and electronic gadgetry, event reports and recordings on vinyl.

Because each issue had a print run of only a thousand copies – and there were only 11 issues before *Source* folded in 1973 due, Austin has said, to a lack of time and money – its continuing influence punches above its original weight. When Steve Reich published the score of his *Pendulum Music* alongside his seminal essay 'Music as a Gradual Process' in *Source*, in which he argued that process in music is more significant than the end result, no one could have foreseen the cultural phenomenon Reich would become. But when the evolution of his early music is discussed, this is the article invariably cited, and it's good to trace it back to *Source*.

Other totemic texts include the score of Cage's *4'33"* (with an extended correspondence between Cage and Austin), Cornelius Cardew's draft constitution for The Scratch Orchestra and the graphic score (plus instructions for its realisation) of Christian Wolff's *Edges*. But look beyond these obvious avant-garde crowd-pleasers and there are many unexpected delights, if that's not too strange a word in this context. The inviting graphic score of Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Appearance* is begging to be interpreted, while Feldman's article 'Conversations Without Stravinsky', during which you realise Feldman is actually 'interviewing' himself, is a new music state-of-the-nation address. This is where Feldman's famous quote about Cardew – 'Any direction modern music will take in England will come about only through Cardew,

because of him, by way of him' – comes from, and he ends with a flourish: 'If the pedant wants to understand me, he must understand my past. I'll take on all comers... Pierre...Karlheinz...Milton...are you ready?' Not words you'd have seen in *Perspectives of New Music*, I suspect.

Philip Clark

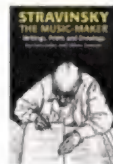
Stravinsky the Music-Maker

Writings, Prints and Drawings

Hans Keller and Milein Cosman

Toccata Press, HB, 242pp, £40

ISBN 978-0907689690



This tome republishes the most comprehensive collection of Hans Keller's introductions to and examinations of various pieces of music by Igor Stravinsky. Also included are Keller's assessments of biographies and dialectics on others' writings about the composer. Keller's diverse scripts are coupled with his wife Milein Cosman's drawings of Stravinsky; some illustrations have not appeared before and are vividly reproduced. As composer Hugh Wood remarks in his Preface, for some, Keller may be an obscure name. Outside of his freelance assignments, Keller (1919-85) was closely associated with the BBC Music Department from 1959 when Radio 3 was known as the Third Programme. Keller was not exclusively always a writer about music, for this violin-playing émigré from Vienna began his literary life penning articles on psychology, psychiatry and sociology.

Keller and Cosman – she was born in 1921 in the German town of Gotha – met at the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947 while working separately for the same magazine. She wished to attend a concert of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* conducted by Bruno Walter and was without a ticket. Keller had a spare. Her drawings of Stravinsky – made between 1958 and 1961 when the aged composer (born in 1882) was in London to conduct the BBC Symphony Orchestra – capture in lively fashion his gnarled features and hunched

Buzzing with activity:
Milein Cosman's
Stravinsky sketches



ILLUSTRATION: MILEIN COSMAN/TOCCATA PRESS

frame, the result of her spontaneous doodling, the end results buzzing with the impression of activity as the composer prepares the musicians. Cosman shares her experiences of meeting and then sketching Stravinsky and about her burgeoning desire to do so. Also included are outlines of Jean Cocteau, designs for a 1951 production of *Petrushka*, and drawings from 1954 capturing the first performance in Venice of *The Rake's Progress*. (Further examples of Cosman's depiction skills are on permanent display in Wigmore Hall, London.)

The bulk of the book is devoted to 27 Keller texts collected for the first time in one volume and with editorial emendations restored. Some of his copy is very short, aphoristic even – barely filling a page – and pithy, while other texts are far more extensive and investigative, analytical but never indigestible. Each piece is adorned with exhaustive footnotes. Included are

reviews of the composer's New York recording of *Symphony in Three Movements* and Ernest Ansermet's Decca acetates of *Symphony of Psalms* (the conductor's London version). Two particularly intriguing articles include one on the Violin Concerto, which Keller wrote for *Radio Times*, published on December 5, 1963, and included therein as early as page 6 (which today seems an inexplicable if welcome entry), and a remarkably extensive introduction to *Symphony of Psalms*, which occupies six of the book's pages (including music examples) that was penned for a performance in Leeds Town Hall in October 1958. Stravinsky and Gershwin are explored together, as are Stravinsky and Schoenberg, the latter composer being another of Keller's passions, as was Mendelssohn's music. Football is not neglected either, there being a mention of Ipswich Town FC. In his preface Wood

recalls Keller in terms that are insightful, humorous and warm. He is equally affectionate towards Cosman, and this makes for informative reading about each person as well as their independences and intertwining. To give an idea of Cosman's sympathies, her list of over 500 subjects captured as images includes Adenauer, Auden, footballer Jimmy Greaves, Richard Strauss and Britten's parrot. As for Keller's commentaries, these are superbly readable in a good-size typeface. You may well find yourself listening to well-known Stravinsky scores with refreshed ears; conversely some of his late works, which may be considered forbidding, could well seem less so once Keller's words have been absorbed, and similarly for Schoenberg. Intellectual Keller certainly was, as well as technically erudite, but there is also enthusiasm, fondness and drollness in his writings that makes this collection engaging and enlightening.

Colin Anderson

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Hot boxes of top US orchestras

William Steinberg's Pittsburgh Symphony classics • Romantics of Charles Munch • Bernstein's Beethoven

Top-ranking American orchestras have been doing rather well in the box-set stakes of late. EMI's 20-CD 'Icon' collection devoted to the Pittsburgh Symphony under the baton of **William Steinberg**, for example, which is much more than a budget-price redistribution of CDs already available. There's plenty included that's new to CD. Vaughan Williams's *Five Tudor Portraits*, programmed as part of the Pittsburgh International Music Festival in 1952, is given a hearty rendition (Nell Rankin and Robert B Anderson are the soloists) and a stereo Wagner programme is supplemented by three pieces recorded in mono, also from 1952.

The stereo *Meistersinger* Overture, by the way, ranks with Reiner's Chicago recording as being one of the finest on disc outside of those taped in the theatre. A 1953 *Rite of Spring* pushes on the gas, though don't expect Dorati-style precision, and I liked the gossamer lightness of Steinberg's Mendelssohn (a mono *Scottish* Symphony from 1952, a stereo *Italian* from 1959). It's amazing, though, how different Capitol's Syria Mosque recordings sound from session to session, some fairly beefy and upfront (a very characterful 1956 Bruckner Fourth, in stereo), while others report a more distantly balanced sound picture, particularly among the strings.

Steinberg directs an atmospheric and dramatically played account of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade* (1955, mono) and the recordings already reissued include numerous treasures. Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8, all of them rigorously thought through, show Steinberg to have been a classicist with heart, as do his Haydn, Mozart and Schubert symphonies. He was a near-ideal partner in concertos, tailor-made for soloists such as violinist Nathan Milstein and pianist Rudolf Firkušný, whose Capitol recordings are among the most notable items in the set.

Other highlights include Rachmaninov's Second Symphony (cut, unfortunately – but then that was generally the norm back in 1954), Tchaikovsky's *Patétique*, some colourful Russian fare and, among

20th-century works, Bloch's First Concerto grosso and Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony. The box cover carries the claim 'The Complete EMI Recordings', yet Mark Kluge's excellent booklet-note refers to William Schuman's Symphony for Strings which isn't included (it was another product of the Pittsburgh IMF, on LP CTL7039), and neither is half of a 1953 Strauss family concert (originally on Capitol CTL7051). So not quite complete but a superb tribute to an under-appreciated conductor. Here's hoping someone takes the initiative to resurrect Steinberg's equally distinguished (and generally better recorded) Pittsburgh legacy for the Command Classics label.

Hopping from Pittsburgh to Boston finds us revisiting some well-loved **Charles Munch** recordings that have been shared between two inexpensive and well-filled RCA Masters sets, 'Charles Munch conducts Romantic Masterworks' and 'Charles Munch: Late Romantic Masterpieces'. The 'Romantics' include some of Munch's most spontaneous recorded performances – the three last Mendelssohn symphonies, Brahms's Second and Fourth symphonies, Schubert's Ninth and Schumann's First. I wasn't too taken with Gary Graffman (a pianist I usually admire) in Brahms's First Concerto and Mendelssohn's *Capriccio brillante*: both performances lack subtlety and can't compare with, say, Serkin and Ormandy from roughly the same period (Sony). And there's the least-known of Arthur Rubinstein's various commercial accounts of Brahms's Second Concerto, again not quite his best and from Munch's standpoint certainly no match for the riveting account he gave with Sviatoslav Richter in 1960 as part of the great Russian's Boston debut concert, which West Hill Radio Archives have just released on CD (WHRA6035, with Beethoven's First Concerto).

The 'Late Romantic' set opens to a blazing *Tannhäuser* Overture and Bacchanale and works through familiar *Tristan* and *Ring* excerpts, culminating in a quite brilliant Immolation Scene with Eileen Farrell.

Munch's Tchaikovsky (Fourth and Sixth symphonies, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Romeo and Juliet*, Serenade for strings) is generally exciting but it was good to remind myself of such RCA favourites as the Tchaikovsky Concerto with Henryk Szeryng, Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and *Kindertotenlieder* with the wonderful Maureen Forrester, an invigorating Dvořák Eighth and two works with the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky (Dvořák's Concerto and Strauss's *Don Quixote*). These RCA/Sony boxes are astonishing value and within the realms of American orchestras alone include much worth adding to your collection, even without booklet-notes.

Leonard Bernstein's New York Beethoven symphony cycle is a variable feast but I'd always be happy to hear his NYPO versions of the Third, Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, while Isaac Stern's pure-toned but muscular account of the Violin Concerto is one of the finest from the period. **George Szell** and the Cleveland Orchestra achieve conceptual clarity, pin-sharp precision and, usually, tonal beauty in 10 of Haydn's finest symphonies (Nos 88 and 92-99, with two versions of 97, and 104). And there's Bernstein's Bernstein, incomparably idiomatic in classic New York versions of the symphonies, orchestral works, *Chichester Psalms*, Serenade, *Trouble in Tahiti*, *Mass* and so on. All self-recommending, really.

THE RECORDINGS



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EMI © (20 discs) 026486-2



'Romantic Masterworks' Munch
RCA Red Seal © (8) 88697 82673-2



'Late Romantic Masterpieces' Munch
RCA Red Seal © (7) 88697 89979-2



Beethoven Bernstein
Sony Classical © (6) 88697 68391-2



Haydn Szell
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'His Beethoven symphonies show William Steinberg to have been a classicist with heart'



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Prodigy and veteran legacies

Remastered recordings by bow masters Michael Rabin, Josef Suk and Henri Temianka are ravishing rediscoveries

I was happy to see that Testament has returned **Michael Rabin's** issued EMI legacy to CD circulation in truly state-of-the-art transfers. Few prodigy violinists showed greater promise and the fact that Rabin lived but 35 years will forever leave us pondering how he might have developed. Rabin was the prototypical 'modern' violinist, an Ivan Galamian pupil with brilliance, technical control and smoothness of tone. He wasn't what you might call an individualist of the bow (in the way that, say, Ivry Gitlis, Heifetz or Mischa Elman were), nor an especially cerebral player (in the Busch, Huberman or Gidon Kremer sense), but these EMI recordings of Paganini's Caprices and First Concerto (two versions), both Wieniawski concertos, Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* and the concertos of Glazunov, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky attest to a formidable talent.

Oddly, it's the shorter pieces that suggest an accomplished showman rather than a great musician, which is where comparisons with **Josef Suk**, who died earlier this year at the

age of 81, become telling. Supraphon's superb six-CD collection of Suk's early duo sonata recordings commemorates a player whose level of musicianship and powers of communication were second to none. His tone as recorded is full and vibrant, with a powerful attack of the bow that resembles David Oistrakh in his prime, and Suk's soft playing will melt your heart (try Debussy's *Clair de lune*). Most of the recordings are with Jan Panenka, a pianist on a par with Oistrakh's early playing-partner Lev Oborin, though there are also duo recordings with the viola player Milan Škampa (Mozart's K424) and cellist André Navarra, whose birth centenary we celebrate this year and who joins Suk for duos by Martinů, Kodály (a wonderful performance) and Honegger.

As to the rest, we're given sonatas or solo pieces by Brahms (all three sonatas), Debussy, Dvořák, Franck, Grieg (Third), Ježek, Respighi, Schubert, Smetana and Suk's grandfather. Many of the recordings are in mono but the playing is magnificent and the sound perfectly up to the task of capturing

its exalted musical quality. Scottish-born **Henri Temianka** doesn't fare quite so well sound-wise for his complete set of Beethoven sonatas with pianist Leonard Shure, recorded live at the Library of Congress in 1946.

What appears to be occasional radio interference proves a minor distraction but the actual playing is exceptional. Shure was Schnabel's assistant and his view of Beethoven takes on board some of the older master's impulsiveness and spiritual depth. The C minor Sonata is given a performance that, for drama and emotional intensity, has few equals. I adored it.

THE RECORDINGS



'Studio Recordings' Rabin
Testament ® ⑥ SBT6 1471



'Early Recordings' Suk
Supraphon ® ⑥ SU4075-2



Beethoven Temianka, Shure
Doremi ® ③ DHR8011/13

Desirable rarities from past virtuosos

Sensitive transfers bring back to vivid life the beauty and skill of performances by vintage European artists

Temianka's origins were Polish, as were those of **Grzegorz Fitelberg**, the conductor, violinist and composer which Dutton features on one of its latest historic reissues. The violin connection is Eugenia Uminska, who plays Szymanowski's First Concerto with the Philharmonia under Fitelberg's direction, not the most secure performance on disc but a persuasive interpretation. The other items are, to my ears, more interesting. Fitelberg is at his best with the LPO in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Tsar Saltan* Suite, a performance that's both supple and exciting. More absorbing still is an early recording of Tchaikovsky's Third (*Polish*) Symphony, memorable for the skilful way Fitelberg handles the transition from the slow introduction to the first movement's main *Allegro*, and for his heartfelt account of the beautiful *Adagio elegiaco*. But beware the cuts – and a 4'18" finale. Scandalous!

Another desirable rarity arrives courtesy of Melodiya, which has gathered together three fine recordings by the Russian pianist

Yakov Zak (1913–76). The disc's highlight is a monumentally stated account of that colossus among piano concertos, Prokofiev's Second, the first-movement cadenza a pianistic Everest that Zak climbs with total confidence. Kurt Sanderling directs a superbly judged accompaniment. Zak's mastery is just as apparent in Prokofiev's Fourth Sonata.

Friedrich Gulda in Salzburg in 1961 gives an elegant account of Mozart's Concerto in A, K488, considerably supported by the Staatskapelle Dresden under Franz Konwitschny, who is on top form in Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, the highlight of which is a warmly singing statement of the lovely *Adagio* slow movement. Konwitschny's credentials as a sensitive Straussian are confirmed by his handling of the *Sinfonia domestica* that fills Orfeo's second CD.

Konwitschny's reputation as a safe pair of hands is matched by the Danish conductor **Mogens Wöldike**, whose substantial discography includes a good deal of Haydn, most famously his Vienna recordings of *The*

Creation and the last six 'London' symphonies. Wöldike's Danish Haydn legacy (with the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra) is in many key respects even better. The playing is crisp and polished, with clear contours to the phrasing and well chosen tempi. We're given Symphonies Nos 43, 44, 48, 50, 61 and 91, the first six of 12 *German Dances* and a most beautiful, Feuermann-like account of the D major Cello Concerto with Erling Blöndal Bengtsson. The transfers and annotation are remarkably good. Strongly recommended. ®

THE RECORDINGS



Szymanowski, etc Uminska, Fitelberg
Dutton ® CDBP9808



Prokofiev Zak, Sanderling
Melodiya ® MELCD100 1789



Mozart, etc Gulda, Konwitschny
Orfeo ® ② C839 112B



Haydn Bengtsson, Wöldike
Danacord ® ② DACOCD703/4

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...


Paul Jacobs

It's well worth exploring a brilliant pianist whose early death robbed America of a great new-music champion, says Jacobs fan **Jed Distler**



New York's new-music scene in the 1960s and '70s would have been poorer without Paul Jacobs's ubiquitous presence as a brilliant keyboard soloist and chamber player, an erudite yet accessible spokesperson for the music he championed and an inspiring teacher and coach. A New York native, Jacobs first made his mark in 1950s Paris, supervising recordings and giving important premieres (Henze's First Piano Concerto, Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*). After Jacobs returned to the US, Leonard Bernstein appointed him the New York Philharmonic's pianist in 1961

(he also became their official harpsichordist in 1974). Indeed, Elliott Carter composed the challenging piano parts in the Concerto for Orchestra and Symphony for Three Orchestras with Jacobs's gifts in mind.

During the 1970s Jacobs made a memorable series of solo recordings and duo piano collaborations with Ursula Oppens for the Nonesuch label, for which he provided scholarly and often witty annotations. An early victim of Aids, Jacobs openly acknowledged his affliction before he died on September 25, 1983, not long after completing what he knew would be his last recording. 



10 'Blues, Ballads and Rags'

Nonesuch © 7559 79006-2
Jacobs brings Copland's *Four Piano Blues* and Bolcom's *Three*

Rags to life with idiomatic elegance, aided by a full-bodied early digital recording made at the Columbia 30th Street Studio. The premiere recording of Rzewski's *Four North American Ballads* (written for Jacobs) is unsurpassed in the way Jacobs balances contrapuntal lines within even the thickest textures ('Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues', for example).

Paul Jacobs



9 Schoenberg: *White-Vieder*

Preisler (F) (2) PR90575

Jacobs produced this massive work's first studio recording,

conducted with clarity and authority by one of Schoenberg's prominent pupils. Despite boxy sonics, Lewis's powerful Waldemar, Semser's opulent Tove and Gesell's impassioned declamation of the speaking are well worth hearing.

John Riley, Richard Lewis, Ferry Grüber, Nell Tangeman, Ethel Semser, Morris Gesell; New Symphony Society of Paris Chorus & Orchestra / René Leibowitz



5 'Elliott Carter: A Nonesuch Retrospective'

(B) (4) 7559 79922-1 (7/09)

Jacobs's long friendship with Carter resulted in standard-setting

performances of most of the composer's works with keyboard, including the Double Concerto and Cello Sonata. He commissioned *Night Fantasies* with Ursula Oppens, Charles Rosen and Gilbert Kalish, and gave its US premiere at New York's Whitney Museum on January 8, 1981. He recorded it a year before he died, with Carter's 1982 revision of the Piano Sonata. Paul Jacobs; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble / Weisberg; London Sinfonietta / Knussen, etc



3 'The Legendary Busoni Recordings'

Arbiter (F) (2) ARBITER124

Jacobs considered Ferruccio Busoni the great underrated

master of the 20th century. While his valedictory Nonesuch disc of the two-piano *Fantasia contrappuntistica* remains unreleased on CD, here Arbiter restores his meticulous interpretations of the six Sonatinas, Busoni's transcriptions of Bach and Brahms organ chorale preludes, and a brilliant programme of 20th-century études by Busoni, Bartók, Stravinsky and Messiaen.

Paul Jacobs



8 Stravinsky: *Petrushka* (1911 version)

Sony (M) SMK64109

Boulez brought both linear

clarity and full-throated orchestral dynamism to Stravinsky's original 1911 *Petrushka*, where Jacobs's incisive piano work prominently figures. Zubin Mehta's less commanding but better engineered digital recording of the 1947 revision also features Jacobs on top form, albeit balanced a little too forward in the mix.

New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Pierre Boulez



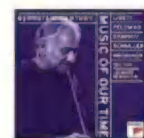
4 Stravinsky: *Music for Four Hands*

Arbiter (F) (2) ARBITER155 (A/O8)

In addition to Jacobs's complete studio Stravinsky collaborations

with Ursula Oppens, this release offers a live 1979 concert held at the defunct New York rock club The Bottom Line, where the pianist intersperses insightful, entertaining commentaries between jazz-influenced works. His respectful yet relaxed conversation with guest pianist Aaron Copland sets the stage for a joyous romp through the *Danzo cubano* for two pianos.

Paul Jacobs, Ursula Oppens, Aaron Copland



2 Messiaen: *Trois petites liturgies*

Sony (M) SMK61845

Not the most elegant and colour-coordinated *Trois*

petites liturgies de la Présence Divine in the catalogue, true, yet the vivid, intensely projected interplay between instruments – piano, ondes martenot, percussion and strings – cannot be denied in this 1961 recording. Jacobs's variety of articulation and rhythmic acuity alone ensures him a place among his generation's most valuable 20th-century music practitioners.

Paul Jacobs; New York Philharmonic / Bernstein



7 'Paul Jacobs: Live'

Arbiter (F) ARBITER130

Recorded at Brooklyn College, where Jacobs taught, these archival live 1972-74 performances

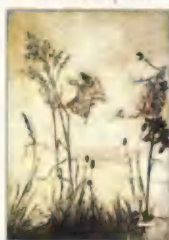
preserve the pianist's risk-taking virtuosity, yielding some hair-raising Beethoven (the D major Sonata, Op 10 No 3) and Falla (*Fantasia baetica*), plus gaunt, line-oriented Ravel (*Valses nobles et sentimentales*). Also included is a gorgeously engineered, regally interpreted home recording of Chambonnières's Chaconne in F major, played on an unabashedly upholstered Dowd harpsichord.

Paul Jacobs



1 Debussy: *Préludes, Books I and II*

Claude Debussy: *Préludes for Piano*
Paul Jacobs piano



Nonesuch (F) (2) 7559 73031-2

Jacobs modifies the impressionistic 'piano without hammers' aesthetic of Debussy's *Préludes* with welcome rhythmic backbone and gorgeously sculpted rapid passagework, yet also revels in the slower works' spacious sonorities, abetted by the unique timbre of the Bösendorfer piano and warm, close-up engineering. He pays heed to the composer's markings and subsequent score corrections, as well as taking Debussy's own piano roll performances into account, such as in the unwritten speeding up of pulse leading into the climax of 'La cathédrale engloutie'.

Paul Jacobs



6 Schoenberg: *Piano Music*

Nonesuch (F) 7559 71309-2

Jacobs first recorded Schoenberg's complete

piano output for the French Vega label in the 1950s. He was reluctant to do it again; but after hearing what he considered a less than adequate recording by one of his contemporaries, Jacobs changed his mind. His Schoenberg piano music quickly became the version of reference and launched his Nonesuch solo series.

Paul Jacobs



AND STEER CLEAR OF ... Debussy: *Etudes*

Nonesuch (F) 7559 79161-2

While Jacobs

unquestionably commands and controls the notes of what may be Debussy's most challenging works for piano solo, the constricted dynamic range and lack of nuance and tonal magic do not wear well in the face of better recorded refined interpretations since (Bavouzet, Uchida, Planès, etc).

Paul Jacobs



Visit the Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk to hear Paul Jacobs's performance of 'La cathédrale engloutie' from Debussy's *Préludes*, on Nonesuch

ARE YOU A SPECIALIST?

Share your recommendations for great recordings of Paul Jacobs on the forum at gramophone.co.uk or suggest recordings of **Lennox Berkeley's music from the 1940s**, the subject of next issue's specialist, Peter Dickinson.



THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

The world through an infant's eyes

Jeremy Dibble seeks a recording that captures the joy and beauty of Finzi's cantata *Dies Natalis*, a setting of Thomas Traherne's reflections on the innocence of childhood

It is one of the paradoxes of Gerald Finzi, a composer of Italian-Jewish extraction, that his music should be, and aspire to be, so quintessentially English. Another is that, in spite of his knowledge and admiration of contemporary musical developments (Bartók, Stravinsky, Hindemith), Finzi single-mindedly cleaved to a diatonic musical language that enjoyed its heyday in the previous generation of Parry (whom he greatly admired), Elgar and early Vaughan Williams. Yet, for all that, Finzi moulded his material into something entirely original and distinctive that transcended any accusation of anachronism or conservatism.

Stylistically, Finzi undoubtedly owed much to that English Romantic yearning established by Parry in *Blest Pair of Sirens* in the latter part of the 19th century. The falling melodic seventh of Milton's moving epode, 'O may we soon renew that song', finds countless resonances in Finzi's own voice – and it was one developed by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Dyson and others in the 20th century. Another major influence that helped to form Finzi's unique mode of expression was the Baroque style-forms of the 18th century. His attraction to counterpoint, indeed to certain types of contrapuntal texture, was derived from his admiration for JS Bach and for the more neglected 18th-century concertos of Boyce, Stanley, Garth and Avison, whose works he enthusiastically proselytised. Moreover, in terms of the forms and genres he regularly essayed, it was those of the 18th-century Baroque that most fascinated him and offered the kind of models he could remould in his own artistic image. In addition, like his 18th-century forefathers, Finzi was ultimately drawn to the voice as the most favoured agency of musical meaning.

The treasure trove of English poetry was, for Finzi, a force of inspiration equal to music. In fact, the very music of poetry and the English language, its scansion, rhythms, intonation, rhymes and forms, became the driving force behind his setting of words, and this flexible technique enabled him to embrace a wide variety of poetical styles, be they of prose, lyric or those seemingly intractable and irregular schemes of Hardy. As he commented to Edmund Blunden in 1952: 'I like the music to grow out of the actual words and not be fitted to them.'

Like Parry and Hardy, with whom he felt acute personal and artistic affinities, Finzi was a non-believer, yet retained a profound, deeply rooted instinct for a culture imbued with Christian philosophy and symbolism. It was one factor that shaped his life deeply. Others were a love of country, and of England's rural beauty and diversity, though this by no means translated into the simple 'pastoralism' which has often been erroneously levelled at English music of the first half of the 20th century. Finzi's understanding of the 'pastoral' was deeper and more penetrating. In common with William Empson's reflections on pastoralism in English literature (*Some Versions of Pastoral*; Chatto & Windus: 1968), Finzi explored the multifaceted seams of this rich mine of ideas and impressions. Landscape was one germane source, as can be heard in the early orchestral pieces *The Severn Rhapsody* or the elegiac *The Fall of the Leaf*, but more important were those elements of awe, rapture and wonder, the miracle of creation, of innocence childhood and the timeless Christian symbols of the Garden of Eden, the Nativity and the good shepherd. Yet Finzi was equally drawn to the darker side of pastoral, to

nature's obliviousness to man (so powerfully evoked in the poetry of Hardy and in Finzi's own selection of Hardy's poems for his song-cycles), to stoicism, and to the popular Romantic notion of lost innocence and the waning personal vision of adulthood. Vaughan Williams, one of Finzi's most important artistic mentors, expressed these concepts most potently in *An Oxford Elegy* (1947–49), as did Finzi a year later in *Intimations of Immortality* (1950), a setting of selected stanzas from Wordsworth's *Recollections of Early Childhood*.

A combination of these sentiments coalesced to form *Dies Natalis* ('Day of Birth') in 1939, arguably Finzi's masterpiece and the work that ultimately forged his reputation as a composer of note. It was typical of Finzi that he should look to the once little-known 17th-century poet Thomas Traherne, a figure to rival, at his best, the work of Henry Vaughan and John Milton, but whose work had only been discovered in manuscript and published in the years before the First World War by Bertram Dobell. Finzi, who amassed a vast library of poetry volumes, clearly sensed a kinship with the Anglican mysticism of Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations* (first published in 1908). Here, in metaphysical language of great passion and conviction, Traherne attempts to see the world of creation through the innocent eyes of a new-born child; it is a concept at once impossible yet deeply compelling to the imagination.

Dies Natalis, conceived as a neo-Baroque solo cantata, was the result of many years of creative gestation. Work on Traherne's texts began as early as 1925 with the first vocal movement 'Rhapsody' (the instrumental 'Intrada' came afterwards) and the final

Madonna and child
with unidentified
saint (17th century,
by an unknown
Emilian artist)



PHOTOGRAPHY: DEAP, MANUSARDI/VENERANDA BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA/DE AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES

'Salutation'. 'Wonder', the slow movement, probably dates from 1926, although Finzi completely recast it in 1938. Only 'Rapture', the dance movement, was composed in 1939 while the composer was moving into his custom-built home at Ashmansworth in Berkshire. In 1938 Finzi's composer-friend Robin Milford saw the whole work save the last movement and urged Finzi to show it to Percy Hull, organist of Hereford Cathedral and director of the 1939 Hereford Three Choirs Festival. By Christmas 1938 Hull had accepted the work for the festival; it was scheduled for September 8, 1939, and was to have been sung by the soprano Elsie Suddaby and conducted by Herbert Sumsion, organist of Gloucester Cathedral. However, in view of the ever-worsening international situation, the Three Choirs decided to abandon the festival on August 31, leaving *Dies Natalis* unperformed.

The first performance took place on January 26, 1940, at a Wigmore Hall lunchtime concert; it was sung by Suddaby with Maurice Miles's New London String Ensemble. There were thoughts of doing the work with Finzi's own Newbury String Players in 1941 but the composer was rewarded with attention from elsewhere. Sir Adrian Boult did some of the movements with Suddaby in 1942 and Bernard Herrmann, the great Anglophile American conductor and composer, broadcast it with CBS and the tenor William Ventura. An invitation also came from Tippett for Finzi to conduct the work himself at Morley College on December 19, 1943, and two days later the tenor Eric Greene broadcast it on the BBC with the Boyd Neel Orchestra (who subsequently took it on tour to Australia and South Africa). This performance and Greene's subsequent championing of *Dies Natalis* tended to consolidate the association of the tenor voice with the work, even though it is clear from the instruction in Finzi's published score

– 'Cantata for Soprano (or Tenor) and String Orchestra' – that Finzi's original conception was for the soprano voice. It was a conception Vaughan Williams always preferred. At the end of the war, the adulation that Finzi enjoyed through *Dies Natalis* was considerable. Ernest Newman was glowing about the composer in the *Sunday Times*. After the delay of seven years, Suddaby sang it at the 1946 Hereford Festival and it was also performed at the Leith Hill Festival at the invitation of Vaughan Williams.

The British Council agreed to record *Dies Natalis* in 1947, although much to Eric Greene's disappointment the decision was made (without consulting Finzi) to have it sung by Joan Cross with the Boyd Neel Orchestra. The recording, made in January 1947, was fraught with difficulties: Cross was not artistically suited to the work, Neel was stranded in Edinburgh for one of the recording sessions by a train strike, so Finzi had to direct two of the movements himself (even now we don't know which two!) and, owing to an electrical fault, there was a pitch discrepancy between them (see Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, page 320). Given that this was the only commercial recording of an extended work by Finzi made during his lifetime, the confluence of these circumstances seems all the more unfortunate.

However, almost providentially, Finzi became aware that **Wilfred Brown**, a Cambridge modern languages student (and, later, a pupil of Eric Greene), intended to perform *Dies Natalis* at a concert of the Cambridge University Musical Club in 1948. Brown, a devout Quaker, became a fervent advocate of the work and performed it under Finzi at High Wycombe with the Newbury Players in June 1952. Seven years after Finzi's death in 1956, Brown finally recorded it under the direction of Finzi's elder son, Christopher; it is still commercially available and, besides

the rarity that is the vinyl recording with Joan Cross of 1947, remains the only tangible link in terms of performing practice we have with the composer. Even more poignantly, the recording also represents a monument to Brown's art as a singer. His premature death, from a brain tumour in 1971 at the age of only 49, was deeply mourned.

INTRADA AND RHAPSODY

Vital, in my view, to a convincing interpretation of the musically related 'Intrada' and 'Rhapsody' is an adherence to Finzi's tempo of *andante con moto*. Equally necessary, too, is a sense of flexibility and cumulative momentum in the *recitativo stromentato* of the highly elastic vocal delivery in the 'Rhapsody', essential to conveying the textual affluence of Traherne's prose. The string sound of the English Chamber Orchestra under **Christopher Finzi** has stood the test of time supremely well. The textures are sumptuous and clear, the hushed dynamics of the big tune, the thrummed *pizzicato* chords and the balance of voice and orchestra are as fine as in any modern recording. This, combined with Wilfred Brown's innate passion and crisp, clear diction, gives the music a sense of inevitability and vibrancy.

Only **Susan Gritton**, **Edward Gardner** and the BBC Symphony Orchestra have the same spirit of élan, and, most important of all, wonder. At times, perhaps, the BBC SO is a little distant for my liking, but Gritton's intonation is virtually flawless and, like Brown's, her belief in Traherne's unbridled awe for creation is conveyed by the fluid manner in which she delivers Finzi's rhythmically untrammelled vocal lines.

John Mark Ainsley, **Matthew Best** and the Corydon Orchestra provide a similarly convincing forward momentum. The 'Intrada' has poise and an infectious breathlessness at its height which is persuasive, and



BEST MODERN TENOR

John Mark Ainsley, Corydon Orchestra / **Matthew Best**

Hyperion © CDA66876

Ainsley's sympathetic grasp of Finzi's elastic vocal style, and the rich sound of the Corydon Orchestra strings under Matthew Best, make this interpretation a vibrant and uplifting experience.



BEST COUPLING

Philip Langridge, London Symphony Orchestra / **Richard Hickox**
Decca © 476 2163

Langridge's performance is well worth having and is particularly good value as part of 'The Gerald Finzi Collection', a grouping of instrumental and vocal works.



BEST SOPRANO

Susan Gritton, BBC Symphony Orchestra / **Edward Gardner**
Chandos © CHAN10590

Dies Natalis, often thought to be a work for tenor voice, was originally conceived by Finzi for soprano and Gritton's superb performance does much to persuade us that it does indeed work well in this form.

Ainsley brings a litheness and energy to the constantly fluctuating array of duplets, triplets and quadruplets in the vocal line. Yet he does not quite capture the pathos of Brown or Gritton. In the recording by **Philip Langridge** and **Richard Hickox**, a suppleness and sonority in the string sound of the London Symphony Orchestra is an attractive feature, and the sense of ensemble is finely wrought. Langridge's brittle tenor voice and his careful diction are also compelling, though occasionally I feel this is obscured by the full orchestral tone, a factor that recurs in the other movements. **Toby Spence** and the Scottish Ensemble produce a more intimate chamber sound (the size of the string ensemble is notably smaller), but the momentum of the recitative sags from time to time and the interpretation is too prosaic, even though Spence comes to life at the climax ('I saw all in the peace of Eden').

Of the other recordings, I found myself disappointed by a number of critical features. **James Gilchrist's** sublime voice is eminently suited to this repertoire but the tempo chosen by him and **David Hill**, and the otherwise beautiful playing of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, is oddly unbalanced. The pastoral 6/8 music of the 'Intrada' feels too ponderous (the *sempre con moto* of the big tune is better) and this barely picks up in the 'Rhapsody'. Indeed, even moments where Finzi marks *animato* (such as in the line 'makes my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy') seem strangely held back, as do the last five pages or so of the score. **Vernon Handley**, also with the BSO, is slower still, though he is able to muster some fervour from the string orchestra at the climax, and **Rebecca Evans** sings her part sympathetically even if, from time to time, she snatches at some of the notes high in her tessitura.

By comparison, **Neville Marriner's** interpretation of the 'Intrada' has much more life, vigour and shape (especially at the *poco stringendo* towards the end). **Ian Bostridge's** articulation of Finzi's speech-like phrases is immaculate but I find it a little too suave and emotionally unengaged given the intensity of Marriner's orchestral accompaniment. Unfortunately, I feel the same about the Canadian soprano **Valdine Anderson's** part in her performance with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra under **Simon Streatfeild**, the only non-British recording of the work among this collection. The sound of the MCO augurs well at the beginning of the 'Intrada' but there is little contrast in the choice of tempi (again, much too slow!), which positively impairs Anderson's attempts at recitative in the 'Rhapsody' (not helped by the suspicion of one or two wrong notes and Anderson's over-nervous vibrato). I would find it hard to live with this recording for very long.



One of four stained-glass windows by Tom Denny at Hereford Cathedral celebrating the life of Thomas Traherne

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1963 Brown, ECO / C Finzi	EMI (M) 565588-2 (5/92)
1976 Langridge, LSO / Hickox	Decca (M) ② 476 2163 (8/01*)
1996 Ainsley Corydon Orch / Best	Hyperion (P) CDA66876 (1/97)
1996 Bostridge, ASMF / Marriner	Philips (P) 454 438-2PH (9/97 - nla)
1996 Evans, Bournemouth SO / Handley	Conifer (P) 75605 51285-2 (9/97 - nla)
1999 Anderson, Manitoba CO / Streatfeild	CBC (M) SMCD5204
2007 Gilchrist, Bournemouth SO / Hill	Naxos (S) 8 570417 (8/08)
2007 Spence, Scottish Ens / Morton	Wigmore Hall Live (M) WHLIVE0021 (4/08)
2009 Gritton, BBC SO / Gardiner	Chandos (P) CHAN10590 (7/10)

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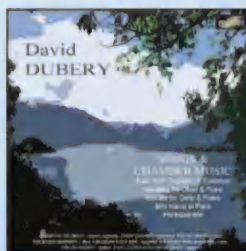
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Wilfred Brown and Christopher Finzi during the recording of *Dies Natalis* at Abbey Road, September 26, 1963



PHOTOGRAPHY: G. MACDONALD/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS



THE TOP CHOICE

Wilfred Brown: English Chamber Orchestra / **Christopher Finzi**
EMI (M) 565588-2

Although this may now be considered a 'historic recording', made in 1964, Wilfred Brown's vibrant lyrical tenor, flawless diction and vivid emotional engagement with Traherne's text still give this interpretation a passionate edge over its rivals.



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THE RAPTURE

This movement is the centrepiece of the cantata. Marked *Danza* and *Allegro vivace e gioioso* by the composer, it is clearly the *scherzo*, a rapturous dance, full of invigorating rhythms, syncopations and exclamations of ecstasy. Anderson and Streatfeild are hopelessly slow here, and Gilchrist and Hill choose a surprisingly pedestrian tempo while Langridge and Hickox, though more rhythmically sharp, lack the dynamism that this movement needs to convey the essence of unrestrained elation. Spence and the Scottish Ensemble choose a good tempo and Spence's top B flat at the end is certainly electrifying, but the string orchestra lacks the 'beef' that some of the fuller orchestral sonorities need. This can be felt, for example, in the coda, where the Elgarian springboard from the low G strings on 'O how divine am I!' (which Finzi must surely have gleaned from the opening of Elgar's Introduction and Allegro) lacks force.

Marriner's tempo is superb, as is Bostridge in the syncopated passages and the spacious tune ('O heavenly joy!'), though his top B flat on 'magnify' seems uncharacteristically rasping. I have a similar criticism of Rebecca Evans. Her high notes positively screech, and although Handley opts for a satisfactory tempo, the BSO is rhythmically less incisive than, for example, Marriner's ASMF. Gritton and Gardner could perhaps have notched up their tempo a little more, although this is compensated for by some lovely, affecting nuances from the orchestra. Gritton sings with tremendous sincerity and conviction throughout this movement and her ecstatic

top B flat ('to show His Love') is pulsatingly vivid. If I have one reservation, though, it is over Gardner's somewhat over-generous *poco largamente* at the close. Best for me, however, are Brown and Ainsley. Their faster tempi and vocal vivacity give the movement a much more compelling impetus and make more sense of Finzi's contrapuntal textures and 'stride' *pizzicato* accompaniment.

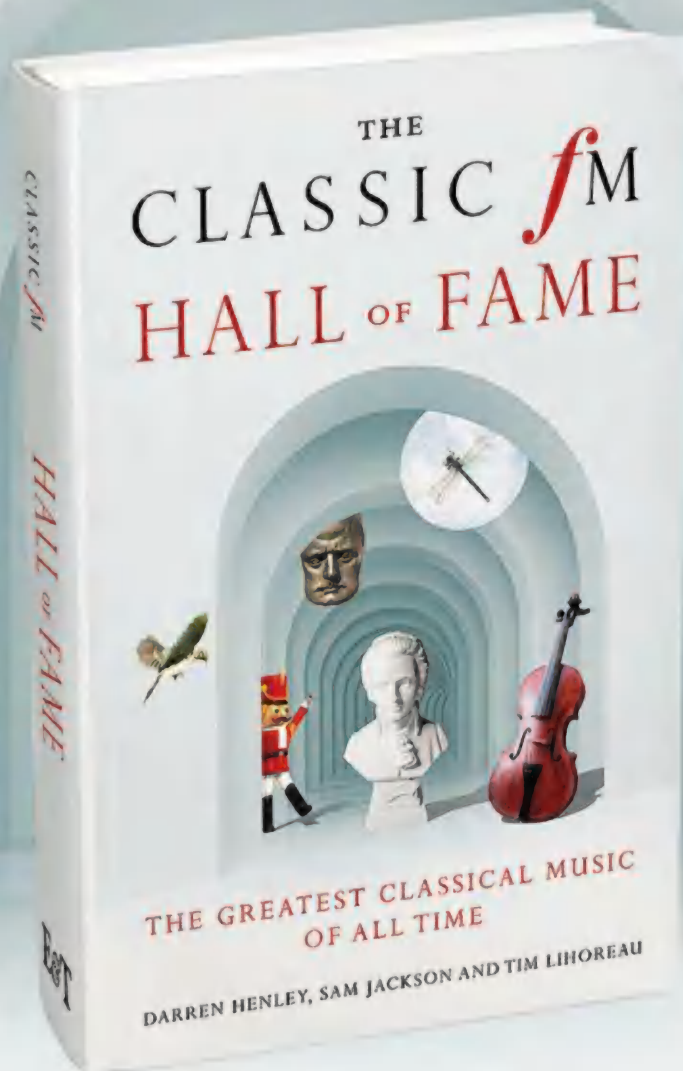
WONDER AND THE SALUTATION

In the last two movements of *Dies Natalis*, where Finzi is working in a slower idiom more amenable to his creative instincts, the recordings are less differentiated by tempo. Instead, it is the sense of pathos and vocal nuance that swings the balance. In this regard I feel ready to put aside those performances of Spence and Evans whose mannerisms, for me at least, jar with the lyrical flow of the musical prose. Neither voice, moreover, gels with the Bachian contrapuntal idiom of 'The Salutation', which requires a more limpid, wistful demeanour. Bostridge and Gilchrist, on the other hand, come into their own – Gilchrist more so than Bostridge for general intonation – and both enjoy opulent string accompaniment. Still, for all that, Langridge's carefully graded phrases suggest greater engagement with the poetry, even though the impression remains of him struggling against the overbearing weight of the orchestra in the climaxes. Ainsley's balance is much more satisfactory, especially in 'The Salutation' where the vocal lines are beautifully sustained and measured. Gritton's interpretations are rather more finely graded, and while she holds

much in reserve for the emotional peaks of both movements, the end of her 'Salutation' is gently and distinctively reflective – a thoughtful insight into Traherne's closing lines on the meaning and strangeness of existence.

Yet, in the end, I have to return to the heady atmosphere of Brown's performances. His articulation of Finzi's malleable phrases in 'Wonder', his subtle attention to detail (the gentle, telling but not over-exaggerated accentuation on the false relation 'How like an angel came I down!') is one of many examples) and the living sense he makes of Traherne's text with its rich language and assonance make an overwhelming impression. Indeed, so winning is Brown's passionate communication of newborn innocence that one feels entirely and willingly transported to the pastoral idyll of Traherne's Eden. And while Brown grades his dynamics and tempi with supreme skill, so that the climaxes have such emotional force, the power of his interpretation is reinforced by the symbiotic ebb and flow of the ECO under Christopher Finzi. Of particular note are the affecting melancholic passages for solo strings in 'Wonder', but for me, the measured Bachian counterpoint and the orchestral ritornellos of 'The Salutation', with their 'golden' Parry-like sequences of falling sevenths, are irresistible. In fact, although this iconic recording is now 48 years old – its status could now almost be considered 'historic' – its immediacy and vibrance have not faded one bit. When I first heard it as a teenager in the 1970s, it was life-changing, and so it still is. **G**

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MUSICAL JOURNEYS

Gramophone's monthly search for the best classical music experiences around the world

Bucharest

James Jolly discovers the Romanian festival held in honour of the nation's musical hero, George Enescu



Oedipe: impressive stage pictures

Now think Romania, and think classical music, and the names that will probably slip easily to the mind are Dinu Lipatti, Radu Lupu, Angela Gheorghiu, Constantin Silvestri – and maybe a couple of others. Visit Bucharest, though, and the Main Man is, without doubt, George Enescu. He gives his name to streets, to orchestras and to a music festival of commendable ambition.

This year's event – it is staged every two years – was a particularly starry affair: on the programme were the Venice Baroque Orchestra, the LSO, the Lausanne CO, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Mariinsky orchestra, the Gulbenkian SO, the Staatskapelle Berlin, the Hungarian National PO, the Vienna PO, the Kammerata Salzburg, the RLPO, the Israel PO and many other local and visiting ensembles and artists. My two days took in concerts by the Hungarian National PO and Zoltán Kocsis, the Berlin Staatskapelle and Daniel Barenboim, and a new production of Enescu's *Oedipe*.

First, it seemed only right to pay a visit to the great man's museum and former residence. It's a beautiful example of Art Nouveau and the interior contains the work of many of Romania's leading artists and architects. After Enescu's death in 1955, his widow gathered together many of his belongings and turned the Cantacuzino Palace into a museum dedicated to his memory. It's full of wonderful things – a few of his violins, numerous photographs, programmes and concert bills.

Concert No 1 took place in the remarkable Romanian Athenaeum, a striking edifice with a fine rotunda and a circular concert hall set

up in the building's dome. The hall is also rather fine acoustically. Zoltán Kocsis, pianist-turned-conductor, gave flavoursome accounts of Bartók's Dance Suite and the Second Piano Concerto with Boris Berezovsky as the wonderfully forceful soloist. The orchestra, too, was on great form, confirming yet again what fabulous musicians Hungary turns out. There was wit and sparkle aplenty.

The highlight, though, was what I'd come for: Enescu's Second Symphony which Kocsis conducted without a score. This was no dutiful run-through to satisfy the festival's rules; it was a superb performance, played with panache and great brilliance. I can't imagine hearing the work done better, so hats off to Kocsis and his fellow Hungarians for such a great performance.

Concert No 2 took place in the vast and cavernous Sala Palatului,

'This was what I'd come for: Enescu's Second Symphony, played with panache'

built as an edifice from which Ceauşescu could harangue his people, and it isn't a space that does music-making too many favours. The Staatskapelle Berlin almost looked lost on the vast stage, but with lidless piano facing into the band, they gave an utterly delightful account of Mozart's K482 Piano Concerto (No 22). The chamber-music sensibility here was a joy, and it's such a treat to witness a conductor and musicians so evidently enjoying each other's musical company.

I've always longed to see Enescu's opera *Oedipe* staged, even though it presents the stage director with considerable challenges: the long sections of orchestra-only music need to be filled, so it must be quite a temptation to indulge in unnecessary stagecraft. It was a temptation that Bucharest's director, Anda Tabacaru Hoge, did not entirely resist. Her choreographic approach created impressive stage pictures with a substantial cast, but video projection was grossly over-indulged.

Musically, though, it was a great success. The young Romanian conductor Tiberiu Soare – a talent we'll surely be hearing more from very soon – led a performance of fierce conviction, lavishing huge amounts of energy on his large orchestra and fabulous chorus.

Oedipe is now in the National Opera's 2011-12 repertoire so if you fancy something unusual in a city full of fascinating treasures, hop on the next flight, and discover Enescu's music for yourself.

Bonn

Charlotte Smith visits Beethovenfest, where the master's contemporary appeal is underlined by his disciple, Liszt

On the surface Beethovenfest is all about tradition. A celebration of a composer active more than two centuries ago, the festival can itself boast a 166-year heritage. Yet, for all its historical perspective, Beethovenfest is a modern affair, painting the city's greatest son as a wholly relevant and influential composer for today. This year's particular focus was Liszt, a nod to

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Jos van Immerseel
conducts Anima Eterna
at Beethovenfest

the composer's 200th anniversary. It was he who, in 1845, organised a three-day music festival – the first Beethovenfest – to coincide with the unveiling of the Beethoven memorial on Bonn's Münsterplatz. So far, so traditional. But it was Liszt the moderniser and visionary who most concerned the festival this year. Under the motto 'Music of the Future', Beethovenfest commemorated a composer who looked back to the Beethoven he revered in order to advance musical forms. Through Liszt, the festival showed how composers of the past continued to affect the development of modern art.

Certainly for the progressive city of Bonn, Beethoven's presence looms large. His face peers out from jewellery shops, book stores and

'Beethoven's face peers from jewellery shops, book stores and galleries'

galleries, in statue and picture form, so he is truly synonymous with the contemporary landscape. His music rubs shoulders with current works, too: on my second day at the festival I attended a performance by Julian Rachlin and Itmar Golan of violin sonatas Nos 8-10, alongside a new work by Richard Dubugnon. The previous day period ensemble Anima Eterna gave us Wagner and Liszt, 'reconstructing' the music from its 'original zeitgeist'. Seen through the prism of the past, the effect was startling, showing just how revolutionary this music had been at the time. 'Art is art' the festival seemed to say – be it ancient or modern – as long as it continues to inspire.

For festival director Ilona Schmiel, Beethoven and Liszt are perfect advocates of classical music for a modern age. Beethoven's message – 'to be risky, true to yourself, live that Utopian dream, but also to remain tolerant' – fitted well with a 21st-century perspective, she said. Liszt, meanwhile, was forever concerned with designing bold 'new art forms for the survival of music'.

Like Liszt, the festival seeks to present 'the ritual of music' in ways that appeal to audiences of all ages and tastes. From training programmes for aspiring young music managers to this year's inclusion of the Iraqi Youth Orchestra, the festival creates 'access points' for musical novices. But refreshingly, too, many concerts are presented without the smoke and mirrors that organisers sometimes feel are necessary to maintain modern attention spans. The calibre of the works and performers on offer in 2011 – including Anne-Sophie Mutter, Murray Perahia and the London Symphony and Gewandhaus orchestras – were enough. For Beethovenfest is a way of life for the thousands who attend each season and, in that sense, it is truly contemporary. ©

The insider's guide

Gramophone's experts select this month's most exciting international music events

2 Cambridge, Corn Exchange

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra celebrate the Corn Exchange's 25th anniversary with performances of Elgar's Cello Concerto with soloist Thomas Carroll, and Dvořák's Ninth. symphony.rpo.co.uk

2 Hong Kong, Culture Centre Concert Hall

Osmo Vänskä conducts the Hong Kong Philharmonic in Mahler's Fifth Symphony and is joined by pianist Paul Lewis to perform Mozart's Piano Concerto No 23. hkpo.com

6 Shrewsbury, St Chad's Church

Ex Cathedra celebrate the Christmas season by candlelight with a mix of traditional favourites, and unusual and contemporary works. shropshiremusictrust.com

7 Liverpool, Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King

The a.p.a.t.t. Orchestra, an ensemble of 'non-specific instrumentation' specialising in 'cross art-form collaborations in unusual settings' presents 'Beneath The Ground'. The programme includes world premieres of Howard Skempton's *Hope Street Melodies* and Jonathan Hering's *The Spiral Staircase*. apattorchestra.com

8 San Francisco, Davies Symphony Hall

Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts Leila Josefowicz and the San Francisco Symphony in his own Violin Concerto alongside excerpts from *Götterdämmerung* with soprano Christine Brewer, and Sibelius's *Pohjola's Daughter*. sfsymphony.org

9 Cardiff, St David's Hall

Thierry Fischer celebrates his last Christmas as BBC National Orchestra of Wales principal conductor with a performance of Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ* with soloists Anna Stephany, Barry Banks and Vincent le Texier. bbc.co.uk/orchestras/bbcnow

9 London, St James's Piccadilly

Chantage, winners of BBC Radio 3's Choir of the Year Competition in 2006, perform sing-along carols. chantage.org

9 Brussels, La Monnaie

Laurent Pelly directs Massenet's *Cendrillon* from December 9 to 29 with double casting of soprano and mezzo for the title role, and mezzo and tenor for the role of the prince. lamonnaie.be

10 London, Spitalfields Music Winter Festival

The annual festival presents the best in early music in various locations east of the City from December 10 to 20, featuring I Fagiolini, The Sixteen and the European Union Baroque Orchestra. spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk

12 New York, Metropolitan Opera

Laurent Pelly's production of Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* runs from December 12 to January 6 and stars Nino Machaidze, Lawrence Brownlee and Kiri Te Kanawa. metoperafamily.org

16 Birmingham, Symphony Hall

Sir John Eliot Gardiner joins the London Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven's Choral Symphony featuring the Monteverdi Choir. thsh.co.uk

EVENT OF THE MONTH

29 Berlin, Philharmonie

Sir Simon Rattle
The Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle see out 2011 in style with performances on December 29, 30 and 31 of Grieg's Piano Concerto with soloist Yevgeny Kissin, alongside works by Dvořák, Ravel, Strauss, Stravinsky and Brahms. berliner-philharmoniker.de



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To Vinterfest 2012 the Artistic Director and world famous clarinetist Martin Fröst has invited the violinists Liza Fertschman and Giovanni Guzzo, the violist Göran Fröst, the cellists Torleif Thedéen and Matthew Barley, the pianists Shai Wosner and Julien Quentin, soprano Karin Avemo and the string quartet Apollon Musagene, amongst others. The symphony orchestra of Dalarna Dalasinfoniettan is conducted by Bjarte Engeset.

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"There's a sense of performers being more in the room with the listener"

ALAN SIRCOM, Editor August 2011, issue 82

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ROBERT H. LEVI - May 2011
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MICHAEL FREMER - JUNE 2011 issue

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DECEMBER'S TEST DISCS



The Quatuor Ébène's disc of **Mozart String Quartets**, on Virgin, has both pace and detail to challenge any system's resolution and dynamic ability to the full.



The sheer power of the brass in the opening of **Mahler 3**, with the Pittsburgh SO conducted by Manfred Honeck, is simply thrilling if your system is up to the task.



The vocal clarity on this retrospective set of **Lorraine Hunt Lieberson** in Berlioz and Handel is enchanting – and pushes loudspeakers hard!

'Best of all, companies are increasingly questioning both function and design'

Andrew Everard sees established thinking being replaced by new and innovative audio approaches

We seem to be approaching one of those points in audio and the wider world of home entertainment electronics where, to quote the old maxim, 'everything you know is wrong'. Once you bought a player to play your discs, an amplifier to control the system and boost the sound, and some big speakers to make the sound in your room.

These days, you're as likely to play your music on a computer-based piece of equipment as a CD player; amplifiers, receivers and the like have increased

functionality way beyond the old 'straight wire with gain' ideal; and speakers seem finally to have realised that they have to fit into your room, not have the entire living-space fitted around them.

Best of all, hi-fi companies are increasingly questioning established thinking on product function and design. The new Iota speakers, from British company Neat Acoustics, not only come in a range of colours, they're also designed to be used 'on their sides', and stand just 13cm tall. Just the thing to fit into a wide range of rooms. Meanwhile

the new BD32 Blu-ray player from Swedish company Primare has 3D capability, the ability to play CD, SACD, DVD and DVD-Audio discs, built-in streaming from a home network, and connectivity for USB and eSATA external storage. It combines all of that with a high-end audio section of in-house design, and looks designed to be all the player's many users could ever want or need.

Or, should you want a different approach, there's the prosaically named Music Receiver from German company T+A, combining CD player, tuner/amplifier and streaming client in one – rather substantial-looking – box. In other words, it's a complete, 'just add speakers' audio system, of the kind we first saw in the original NaimUniti.

On which subject, this month sees the *Gramophone* review of the brand-new Naim SuperUniti, which is so much more than the original, and louder. And I'm wondering whether computer audio always means being desk-bound while you listen. ⑥

1

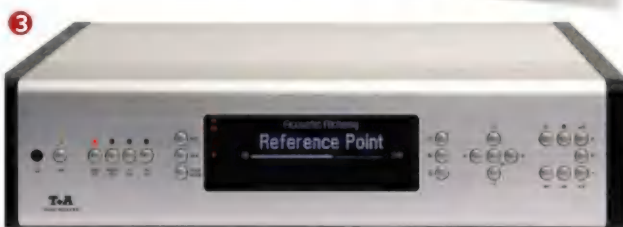


'Speakers seem finally to have realised that they have to fit into your room, not have the room fitted around them'

2



3



1 Small, colourful and – well – neat, the new **Neat Iota** speakers are around £650 a pair, and designed to fit into tight spaces

2 A multiformat disc player also able to stream network music, the £3250 **Primare BD32** promises high-end sound from all sources

3 The name couldn't be more literal: the **T+A Music Receiver** combines CD player, tuner/amp and streamer for £2690

REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Naim SuperUniti: moving all-in-one hi-fi forward

The latest Naim 'just add speakers' streaming system is its best yet, says **Andrew Everard**

Naim's Uniti series has been something of a game-changer. Not only has the arrival of the new range opened up a whole new revenue stream for the company, it's also brought new customers to the brand and seen an ongoing expansion of research and development resources.

From the original NaimUniti of less than three years ago, the company has expanded its line-up to include the compact UnitiQute, the UnitiServe ripper/storage/player device, and two component streaming players, the NDX and brand-new ND5 XS. Along the way, the products have also moved with the times, adding direct digital iPod/iPhone/iPad connectivity, gaining the iOS control 'apps' n-Stream and n-Serve, and most recently upgrading their capability to encompass 192kHz/24-bit high-resolution music.

Now the range has further expanded with the arrival of the £3250 SuperUniti, an all-in-one 'just add speakers' system Naim describes as being particularly well-suited for 'large rooms and those who like to play their music just that little bit louder'. Compared with the UnitiQute's 30W per channel into an 8ohm load, the SuperUniti is somewhat meatier in the amp department: at 80Wpc it's the most powerful Uniti product to date.

Rather as the original NaimUniti drew on the company's existing 5 Series amplifiers, so the SuperUniti takes its lead from the SuperNait integrated amp, both in its power delivery and in its range of inputs: along with its streaming capability and onboard FM/DAB radio tuner, it has no fewer than 10 inputs for external equipment, six of those being digital.

It's also state of the art when it comes to its streaming capability: it handles 192kHz high-resolution content 'straight from the



NAIM SUPERUNITI NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM

Price £3250

Power output 80Wpc into 8ohms, 120Wpc into 4ohms

Audio formats supported WAV and AIFF (up to 32bit/192kHz) FLAC (up to 24bit/192kHz) ALAC (up to 24bit/96kHz) WMA 9.2 (up to 16bit/48kHz), Ogg Vorbis (up to 16bit/48kHz), MP3 and M4a (up to 320kbit/s)

Radio FM RDS/DAB/internet

Analogue inputs Two line on RCA phono, one line on five-pin DIN, front line in on 3.5mm stereo socket

Digital inputs Two electrical (one BNC coaxial, one RCA), four optical (three Toslink, one miniToslink on front panel), USB with direct iPod/iPad/iPhone connectivity

Outputs One pair of speakers,

preamp output on four-pin DIN, subwoofer, digital audio out (BNC), headphones on 3.5mm stereo socket

Other connections Remote in/out, USB mini-B for updates

Accessories supplied Wi-fi antenna, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.2x8.7x31.4cm
naimaudio.com

box', thanks to the use of the company's latest streaming board, and is also the first Naim to be able to play Apple Lossless files in their native form, rather than requiring transcoding software elsewhere in your streaming system.

The SuperUniti draws heavily on the digital design of Naim's NDX network music player, itself derived from the company's DAC: it employs the company's 'Zero Jitter' buffering system for external digital sources, clocking incoming digital signals into the

buffer memory, then clocking them out again to provide a stable stream to the conversion section. The digital filter, capable of up to 16x oversampling, is also of proprietary design, being executed in digital signal processing running on a SHARC processor, while the digital to analogue conversion is the Burr-Brown chipset found in the HDX and NDX.

Naim describes the SuperUniti as a combination of the UnitiQute, SuperNait and Naim DAC, but there's one aspect of the

THE FUTURE OF HI-FI

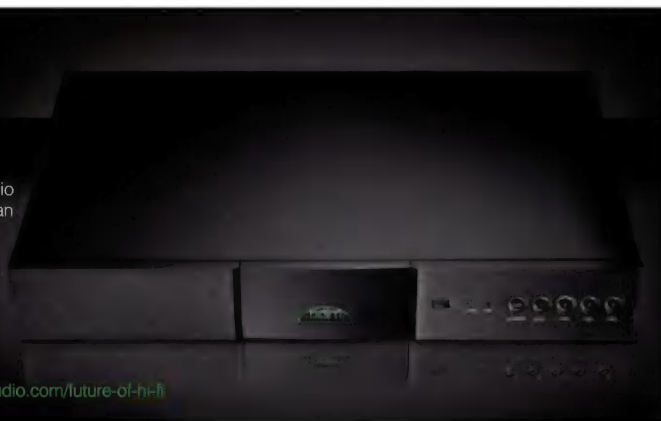
DAC Digital to Analogue Converter

Equipped with eight S/PDIF inputs and two USB sockets and capable of handling audio data sampled at up to 768kHz and with up to 24bit resolution, Naim's DAC is more than a digital to analogue converter, it is the ultimate digital hub.

Whether your source is a PC or Mac, hard disk server, streaming source, CD player or iPod, DAC will give your system an instant sonic boost.



Find out more about Naim's digital products at www.naimaudio.com/future-of-hi-fi



SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The high quality of the new SuperUniti means serious speakers should be considered



NAIM OVATOR S-400

The obvious choice for the SuperUniti, and used by Naim for demonstrations, the S-400s sell for £3250/pr



NEAT MOTIVE SE2

A more affordable choice, and another classic pairing with Naim electronics, the compact Motive SE2s are £1365/pr



design you won't find in any of those donor components: an all-new analogue volume device, with discrete resistors and high-performance electronic switches for sound quality, its settings controlled digitally to retain the convenience of remote operation.

Neat touches abound, from the way in which it can control connected Naim components, such as a CD player, to the availability of a fixed input level should one want it to connect the system to an AV receiver.

Clever, too, is the incorporation of an extra optical digital input within the 3.5mm stereo analogue input on the front panel, the smooth way the SuperUniti works with the n-Stream

From the opening blast of the Pittsburgh Mahler recording, here ripped into Apple Lossless and streamed from my network storage device, there's never a single doubt that the SuperUniti is fully in control, with superb 'oomph' and definition in the bass and fine dynamic capability, even when playing at unsociably high levels. It all makes for a dramatic and highly involving listen.

What's more the same traits serve the Naim system well when playing something performed by rather smaller forces than the 'big band' Mahler, delivering the Quatuor Ebène's supple, subtle reading of Mozart string quartets in a fluid, dynamic manner,

'There's never a single doubt that the SuperUniti is fully in control, with superb "oomph" and definition in the bass'

control application, and even a greatly improved software upgrade procedure via a mini-USB socket on the rear combined with a programme designed to run on Windows PCs.

PERFORMANCE

The SuperUniti is good – very good indeed: it's remarkable what the lower-powered Unitis can do even when driving some big, demanding speakers, but the new model has a weight and resolution of fine detail that takes it way beyond what are now the junior models in the range, plus all the grip and drive to make the most of ambitious speaker choices.

It sounds perfectly at ease driving the big PMCs, even when pushed up to 'front row of the audience and then some' levels with big orchestral recordings: however thrilling and challenging the dynamics of the music, there's seemingly plenty in reserve, and the SuperUniti never sounds like it's being pushed.

revealing the disc is rather better engineered than was suggested in last month's review, and giving an overall impression of musicians 'comfortable with the skins they're in', to use a term from the jazz world.

These two recordings are just two of the many I tried during my time with the SuperUniti, including some from way beyond the classical field (yes, I know...), and as well as noting that the Naim never disappointed across a wide range of genres, I have to note how much it really shines when fed high-resolution music, especially the 192kHz/24-bit content from the label of the Salisbury company's old rival in Scotland!

Getting on for three years after the first NaimUniti broke cover, there's no doubt that its manufacturer is continuing to improve the breed. Without a doubt this is the best Uniti yet, and – as Naim's Roy George suggests to the right – there's even more to come. **G**

DESIGN NOTES

Roy George

Prog, Puccini and how it's all down to timing...

Naim technical director Roy George has been described as the one person most responsible for the company's sound. And he first grew his enthusiasm for music as a student at Southampton University in the 1970s.

'It was the prog rock era, but university gave me the opportunity to revel in all kinds of live music, from jazz, rock and folk to mainly modern classical music such as Bartók, Ligeti and Stockhausen,' he says.

These days his collection also includes more 'mainstream' classical music, from Mozart and Bach to Schubert and opera from Puccini and Verdi. And George has strong views on what makes hi-fi work, although he admits the Naim sound has changed over the years.

'It's become more refined and capable but without losing that sound, as if the band or orchestra is playing together, while others make it sound as if all the tracks were put together like a patchwork. There's no energy, no life and it doesn't drag you into the music.'

The company's R&D is currently focused on network players: 'It's not that we're disregarding CD, but networked music is growing and the market for CD players is shrinking. We've been researching servers and "streamers" for a long time, and the more we know the more we need to learn. We're totally confident there's more performance to come.'

'When it comes to streamed, music, the more we know, the more we need to learn'



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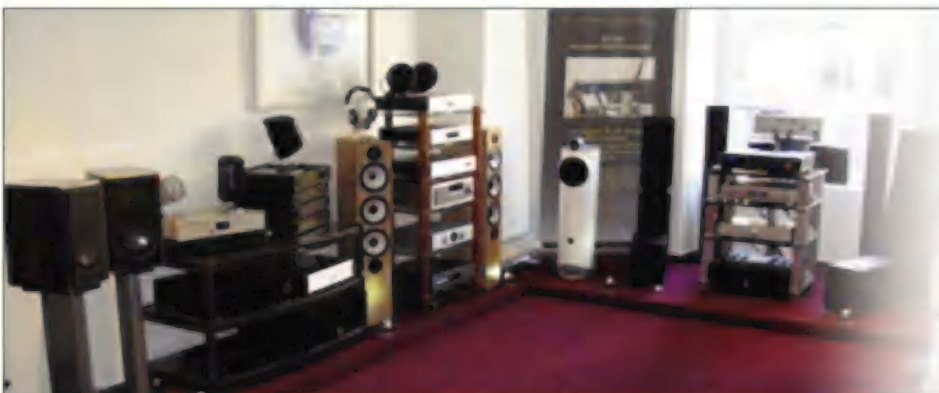
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REVIEW MONITOR AUDIO GOLD GX100

Class-leading speakers through in-house design

Investment in technology pays off in this compact loudspeaker, says **Tony Williams**

Monitor Audio has a clear strategy: innovations from its flagship products trickle down to more affordable ranges, and overseas manufacture of components is sourced not just for cost reasons, but because the companies it uses produce items of superior quality.

Thus the GX100 speakers we have here – part of a small, but flexible, Gold GX range – combine drive-unit technology derived and developed from the company's exotic Platinum line-up with beautifully finished cabinets in a choice of wood veneers plus high-gloss piano lacquer.

The £1250/pr speakers are the larger of two GX standmount designs, but these are hardly huge loudspeakers at just 36.2cm tall, and the choice of finishes, plus the magnetic fixings for the grilles and bolt-through driver mounts, give a clean and modern look.

The tweeter is a ribbon, derived from the Platinum speakers, but redesigned to cover a frequency range from the relatively high 2.7kHz crossover point all the way up to 60kHz. Sitting below it, both in frequency terms and in the front baffle, is a 6.5in/16.5cm mid/bass driver using one of Monitor Audio's dished C-CAM ceramic-coated metal-alloy cones.

In these models, the dimples used to stiffen the cone in past MA speakers are replaced with radial ridges; sales director Alex Brady explains that this design was arrived at after extensive computer modelling running into dozens of iterations.

This new woofer combines with Monitor Audio's HiVe II high-velocity port, to the rear of the speaker, in the quest for tighter bass and improved transient response, and the enclosure itself is built from laminated 20mm MDF, with extensive bracing to



ensure rigidity. Bi-wirable terminals are provided, along with extremely transparent grilles, and dedicated stands are available for £350, though any rigid stand around 50-60cm tall would be fine.

PERFORMANCE

The pair of speakers I received for review, very smartly finished in Piano Black Gloss, had been used for a while before dispatch, so needed minimal running-in to loosen them up and have them performing as they should.

And the GX100s' take on 'as they should' is undeniably impressive: this is a fast, dynamic, exciting loudspeaker design, capable of remarkable slam and drive in the bass, along with seamless integration through the midband and on up into one of the sweetest, yet most explicit, top-ends around. The music is never any less than entirely controlled, and yet has that wide-open, rich, detailed presentation that just begs the listener to listen more closely to what's being played, revelling in the sheer amount of character and detail on offer.

Particularly striking is the openness of that treble, used to delicious effect in making clear every nuance of Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's

intonation and phrasing on her Berlioz/Handel set, reviewed last month.

Especially impressive is the sense of air and space in the sound, making the most of 'location' recordings, and the way the GX100s deliver a stereo image with both depth and precise location of instruments. With minimal toe-in the sound snaps into focus, and after that the speakers do a fine job of placing music in an entirely realistic fashion.

They may be larger than the common idea of compact speakers, but the additional weight and power they bring to music, allied to that smoothly explicit midband and sweet, beautifully extended treble, is more than sufficient payback for their extra size. **G**

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD GX100 TYPE TWO-WAY STANDMOUNT SPEAKERS

Price £1250/pr

Drive units Ribbon tweeter, 16.5cm C-CAM mid/bass driver

Frequency response 42Hz-60kHz

Suggested amplifier power 60-120W

Sensitivity 88dB/W/m

Impedance 8ohms nominal

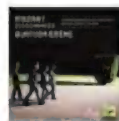
Finishes available Bubinga, Dark Walnut, Natural Oak, Piano Black or White Gloss (Ebony available at extra cost)

Dimensions (HxWxD) 36.2x21x33cm

www.monitoraudio.com

HOW TO TEST...

If you're going to audition these Monitor Audio speakers, make sure the demonstration pair has been well used: some running-in is needed to smooth off initial rough edges. Then use a disc such as the Quatuor Ebène's Mozart set on Virgin and revel in the sheer amount of detail.





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● **ESSAY**

Is computer audio turning music from a social pleasure into a solitary one?

As music moves increasingly towards downloads and streaming, let's not lose sight of the allure of the comfy sofa and listening with others, says **James Vesey**

When I was a child, one of the highlights of the day was *Listen With Mother*. It was a chance for parents to take a break from household chores (and children from devising new ways of annoying those parents) and for both to sit down and enjoy listening to something together.

Spool on a decade or so and many of my musical discoveries were made while at university, where those of us lucky enough to have record players would often visit each other's rooms to play a new acquisition.

I always remember the joy and amazement on the face of a Wagner-fanatic friend the first time I played him the opening of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*; I think he went out the next day and bought the set for himself.

I was reminded of that time of musical adventure and exploration when reading the Design Notes accompanying this month's main audio review: Roy George's recollection of his time at university paralleled my own, in a different place at much the same time, and I recalled how almost every day brought a new musical discovery, a slight broadening of my listening horizon.

Now, as the download/music streaming age dawns, there are arguably even more opportunities for hearing new

music whenever one wants, but there's a fundamental danger in having all your music concentrated on, or accessed via, your computer. Which is that you'll find yourself sitting at the computer to listen.

Even worse, in today's 'content rich, time poor' world, there's the possibility that music will for many slip even further from being something one consciously makes space for in one's life, by sitting down and listening, and instead is no more than a background for surfing, emailing, Tweeting or whatever.

In the past – and I am afraid I'm talking dim and distant rather than recent – I went fairly often to meetings of a recorded music society. Once I got over my fear of being surrounded by people who knew much more than me – fortunately it wasn't like that at all – I found it an excellent way to discover new works in the company of others and to have a chance to share, discuss and even argue about what we'd just heard.

Yes, I know these days one can do that via all kinds of social networking sites, but it just isn't the same as listening together and sharing the same musical experience.

On a more personal level, I enjoy sitting down with my partner to listen to a new recording, not just to have someone to

'It's always an enjoyable moment when a new recording comes to its end and there's a silence followed by one word: "Well...?"'

'bounce reactions off', but also to see just how it affects us. It's always an enjoyable moment when a work comes to its end and there's a silence followed by one word: 'Well...?'

Yet, when I look around so many websites dedicated to 'computer audio', and browse through the user-galleries showing 'My system', I'm more than a little dismayed to see speakers put on desktops either side of a big computer monitor, with the only listening position clearly defined by an uncomfortable-looking 'executive' swivel chair.

Maybe it's a sign of the growing-up of the initial iPod generation, used to shutting the world out when listening to music, but it needn't be this way. As these pages have been explaining for some time, there's a wide variety of ways to bridge the gap between PC and hi-fi and make music-listening sociable.

After all, great music is far too good to keep to yourself – share it and enjoy it more! ©

Bang & Olufsen's BeoSound 4 PC speakers are excellent, but do we always want to listen to music sitting at a desk?

There are now many ways to free music from your PC and get it to your hi-fi



NOTES & LETTERS

Bountiful Baker • To clap or not to clap? • Briselli unfairly traduced • Beethoven's tempi

Sound judgements

Your article on the new Musiikkitalo, Helsinki (Awards issue, page 138), appears to imply that the music-loving citizens of Finland have, until now, been denied the opportunity to 'hear the music they love as it was intended'.

Not so. The lovely city of Lahti lies 60 miles to the north, close to the home of Sibelius and home of the Sibeliusstalo Concert Hall. Situated on the lakeside, this modern wooden building, built inside an inverted rectangular glass goldfish tank, has the very acoustic you describe as now being available in Helsinki.

As a regular visitor to the annual Sibelius Festival and keenly interested in all acoustics, I can assure you and your readers that the Lahti Sibeliusstalo is in itself a superb-sounding instrument.

Ted Adams, via email

Not just Communists

As a retired US government employee, and a veteran of countless marches and demonstrations in the 1960s and early 1970s protesting against the Vietnam war, I was outraged by Jon Voight's utterly false claim that 'almost all the marches against the war were organised by communists' (My Music, Awards issue, page 162).

Gramophone should not be a vehicle for such mendacious political slanders.

*Daniel Morrison
Congers, NY, USA*

Applause, please, for applause

I do not share Richard Martini's aversion to the retention of applause in live recordings (Letter, Awards issue, page 9). Applause is, after all, an integral part of a live performance, helping to preserve the atmosphere and complete experience, particularly if it's an event one has attended.

Mr Martini regards it as 'perverse' to retain the applause when it can so easily be excluded. It seems to be far more perverse to object so strongly to its inclusion that he denies himself the enjoyment of a performance 'no matter how good it is in other respects'.

*David Woodhead,
via email*

Letter of the Month



Dame Janet Baker:
a worthy Lifetime
Achievement
Award-winner

Dame Janet: making the mezzo universe her own

How wonderful that Dame Janet Baker was given the Lifetime Achievement Award at the *Gramophone* Awards 2011 (page 40).

I count myself fortunate that, I suppose serendipitously, I was in on most of her great career as a singer. I first heard her on LP in 1962 as Purcell's Dido in the now legendary Decca recording. Of many great live occasions on which I heard her, I would like to mention three.

At a Prom in the early '60s, I heard her sing Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with the (then) Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Alexander Gibson, with whom she developed a special musical relationship. You could have heard a pin drop that August evening in the Albert Hall. Might it have been her first *Das Lied* in public?

Then, in the late '60s, I was in the audience at the Royal Opera House the night she had to stand in at short notice for an ailing Josephine Veasey as Berlioz's Dido. The production was sung in French, of course, and at that time Baker only

knew the role in English following her performance with Scottish Opera, but it didn't matter. She and Jon Vickers were fabulous and at the curtain calls, the house went wild. When the substitution was announced from the stage at the start of the evening, someone called out 'and about time too!' I don't think anyone present would have disagreed.

There were so many other wonderful performances, among them her Mary Stuart at the ENO, but I will finally mention a performance she gave in the mid-'70s in the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, with Bernard Haitink, of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*. She wasn't a Wagnerian, of course, but still made the songs her own, a fact the Dutch audience were not slow to appreciate. A unique voice and a truly great artist.

I hope there will be appropriate celebrations in 2013 when Dame Janet Baker reaches her milestone 80th birthday.

*Robert Love
Glasgow, UK*

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Kill the applause

Richard Martini wrote the letter I would like to have written, decrying the inclusion of applause in live recordings, making my points far more eloquently than I could have done. For me, it's as infuriating as the constant, intrusive, unnecessary and over-loud announcements we all suffer on trains.

Many 'live' recordings are assembled from a number of concerts and are, therefore, not a 'performance' at all, so hardly justify applause. For example, from which of the concerts was the applause taken? I go a step further than Mr Martini and tend not even to read reviews of live recordings, knowing I won't be buying them because of the expectation of applause.

Equally disturbing is the growing tendency of record companies to omit from their packaging any indication of whether the recording is truly 'live' or not. Having been caught out more than once by unexpected applause, I will no longer buy Supraphon records. Deutsche Grammophon's recent release of Mozart's horn concertos with Alessio Allegrini under Claudio Abbado is another case in point. With no indication that the recordings were made live, or evidence that audience noise had been included, the applause at the end came as a real shock and, despite the considerable merits of the performances, I shall be ditching my copy.

Mr Martini's suggestion that an indication should be given in your reviews that applause has been included in a disc under consideration is obvious and sensible. Since you already note in the headings of your reviews whether or not a recording is live, an extra couple of words there would surely do the trick.

Keith Davies
Teddington, Middx, UK

Applause? Just feel the love

I, for one, just adore applause on disc. The thrill of the audience reaction following Martha Argerich's and Riccardo Chailly's performance of Rachmaninov No 3 is, for me, overwhelming. When I'm conducting it myself in my living room I'm always very taken with the audience's love.

My latest favourite from among recorded applauses is the one on Vladimir Jurowski's recording of Mahler's Second Symphony. It's perfectly timed, and with its one all-too-eager 'bravo' shouter it is surely worthy of repeated listenings. Just compare it, for example, with the applause on Tennstedt's live recording of the same symphony. It's good, too, but just not quite as effective. But I agree that a lame

audience reaction can ruin an otherwise good live recording. So then, I think, it should be omitted.

My favourite applause of all time? Well, it has to be the one awarded to Renata Tebaldi and Richard Tucker after a performance of the *Andrea Chénier* duet in Chicago in 1956. The audience almost completely drowns out the orchestra for the last 40 seconds of the piece. It's an absolute classic.

Daniel Rehn
Stockholm, Sweden

Barber's 'lightweight' finale

In Edward Greenfield's review of the Barber Violin Concerto (September, page 54) he wrote: 'Notoriously, the soloist for whom the work was originally commissioned [Iso Briselli] found the dazzling *moto perpetuo* finale too difficult to play...' That is absolutely false. This account was definitively refuted in Barber's correspondence discovered in 2010 at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. As Barber states in his December 14, 1939 letter (see www.isobriselli.com), Briselli's complaint was that the finale '...did not suit musically the other two movements; it seemed to him rather inconsequential'.

Neither Barber nor Briselli ever asserted that Briselli had any difficulty playing the finale. Even before the recent discovery of Barber's correspondence, his pre-eminent biographer, Dr Barbara B Heyman, expressed her incredulity at the claim that Briselli found difficulty with the finale. She noted that Briselli had performed the most difficult repertoire (ie all the major

violin concertos as well as bravura pieces by such composers as Paganini, Sarasate, Wieniawski, Ernst, Vieuxtemps and Ysaÿe) to rave reviews. Mr Greenfield's implication that 'the first performance in Philadelphia was given instead by the veteran Albert Spalding' because Briselli couldn't play it, and that in contrast to Briselli, 'Bowes has no trouble coping with the fierceness of the writing...' simply compounds the insult.

Briselli's problem with the finale was purely musical. He had received the first two movements from Barber in the middle of October 1939 and liked them very much. But when he received the finale in late November, he felt it was too lightweight by comparison. He told Barber that it did not have a sense of belonging; it seemed musically unrelated to the first two movements, and he thought it was insufficient in compositional form or development to stand as the finale of a major work. It was important to Briselli that the commission be as substantial as the other major concertos in his repertoire that he was offering for prospective engagements.

Briselli asked Barber to rewrite the finale; he would premiere it at a later date to give Barber more time if needed. He suggested possible ways in which the movement could be deepened or expanded; perhaps even changing its form altogether to, perhaps, a sonata-rondo; and that he might expand the third movement while possibly retaining the *moto perpetuo* as the middle section and giving it more clearly defined structural parameters. Briselli felt that only then would it be a complete, first-class concerto. Despite Briselli's prodding, Barber was dismissive of his suggestions and declined to alter it.

This was a big disappointment for Briselli. He believed that with a substantial third movement, the work could stand as a great American violin concerto. However, Briselli decided to hold his ground and chose to forego the concerto's premiere and relinquish his claim on it.

Marc S Mostovoy
Philadelphia, PA, USA



Samuel Barber:
his Violin Concerto
caused controversy

Sweelinck fully intégral

In reviewing Harry van der Kamp's new recording of Sweelinck's *Cantiones sacrae* (Awards issue, page 109), Fabrice Fitch wonders 'if this is to be the only *intégrale*'. A complete set was recorded by the choir of Clare College, Cambridge, under Timothy Brown on Etcetera in 1998, and then again, a year later, by Trinity College, Cambridge, under Richard Marlow on Hyperion.

Stephen Barber
Carterton, Oxon, UK

Taking Beethoven's pulse

Over the years I have read (and enjoyed) *Gramophone*, I have noticed an unfortunate tendency of critics to disregard what scores say when appraising recordings – all too often they pay little or no attention to the scores at all. This isn't simply a question of taste but surely one of professional honesty.

One example I'll single out, since I have seen it so many times, was repeated yet again by Richard Osborne in his recent review of Riccardo Chailly's new set of the Beethoven symphonies (Awards issue, page 80). Of Symphony No 5, he writes: 'The first two movements of the Fifth Symphony are brilliantly realised here but the lack of a consistent pulse in the *Scherzo* and finale makes for broken-backed transitions (Klemperer played the two movements in a single pulse, one bar of the *Scherzo* equalling half a bar of the March at Beethoven's metronome=84, conferring a sense of sublime inevitably on the whole).'

Mr Osborne has written about this before – off the top of my head, I recall him praising Harnoncourt's recording for using this same 'through-pulse' approach.

All well and good and, on one level, Mr Osborne has a point; by sticking to a metronome mark of 84, one does indeed get a continuous pulse. But here's the rub: in the score, Beethoven asks for the *Scherzo*'s tempo to be 96 bars per minute, whereas in the finale he asks for *minim*=84. I accept that Beethoven's deafness might not always have enabled him to alight on the ideal metronome mark for a given movement but nobody (to my knowledge) has ever suggested that his maths was faulty. There can be no doubt that he knew the difference between 96 and 84 so, surely, the only possible conclusion is that, rather than wanting a continuous pulse, Beethoven *did* want what Mr Osborne dismisses as 'broken-backed transitions'.

Having conducted the piece many times, I have always found that, far from giving a welcome (?) continuity to the work, slowing the pulse slightly has the wholly beneficial effect of making the finale that much more weighty and triumphant. In the context of the first unambiguous arrival of uninhibited C major in the piece, that seems to work – as is almost always the case when one simply does what the composer asks for. Not being one of them, I prefer to stick to what one of the greatest-ever creative geniuses wrote on his scores and trust his judgement. In the recording of another (slightly lesser!) genius, Carlos Kleiber (still the yardstick by which other recordings must be judged), the start of the finale shows exactly how well this works if done exactly as written. The



Chailly's Beethoven:
inconsistent pulse?

point holds even if one does not stick to Beethoven's tempi precisely; there is a world of difference between what is possible in a dry acoustic (faster tempi) and a very resonant one (slower) but, provided the relations between the tempi are correct, the effect of this designedly jarring transition still works. Some recordings do the opposite – Haitink's recent Beethoven Fifth with the LSO for example. Here, the pulse of the finale is faster than that of the *Scherzo* and, while many critics said that this made for an exciting romp, no one noted that this is the opposite of what Beethoven demands.

In short: why cannot Mr Osborne say, 'Well, Klemperer does X and I happen to like it, but actually that's not what the score says, so, interesting though it is, it isn't what Beethoven wrote'?

Tom Gauterin
Stroud, Glos, UK

Transcendent writing

I was very saddened to read that Philip Kennicott has written his final column (Awards issue, page 24). After John Steane's death my only consolation was that Mr Kennicott's page remained as an example of transcendent writing and something to look forward to. Writers such as those make a magazine outstanding rather than just a source of information.

Matthias Teufel, via email

Are shops to blame?

I was astonished to discover from the mail order firm I regularly use that none of the famous benchmark cycles of Beethoven quartets is currently available. The Végh, Talich and Hungarian have all been deleted.

Another general point I would like to make concerns the sorry state of classical retail and the disappearance of specialist

shops. HMV is now an unappealing place. They don't stock a wide enough selection and don't seem to have knowledgeable staff.

In Berlin a shop called Dussman combines a bookshop and record store, and is miles better than anything I have seen in the UK. There is a need for things to improve, so no wonder sales are falling.

Francis Fitzlibur
Lisburn, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland

Editorial notes

In Session Report (November issue, page 18), the solo Harry Christophers was referring to when he said, 'This one features a high soprano solo, sung with astonishing assurance by Elin Manahan Thomas' was from the *Tenebrae Responsories*' last movement.

In The Trial (Awards issue, page 27), the correct catalogue number for Maazel's *Carmen* is 74321 39495-2.

The top choice in Jeremy Nicholas's Collection on *Ad nos* (November issue, page 106), by organist Thomas Trotter, is currently available only on a DG box-set: 477 9525GB34.

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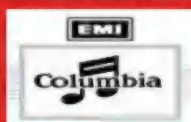
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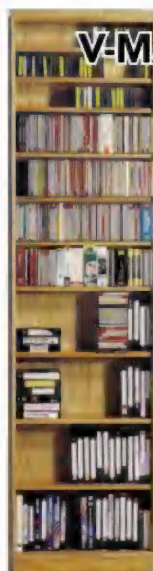
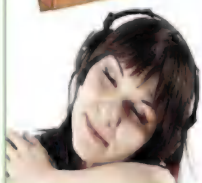
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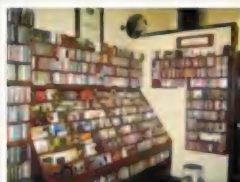
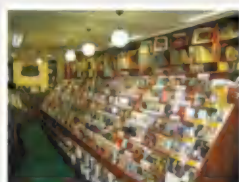
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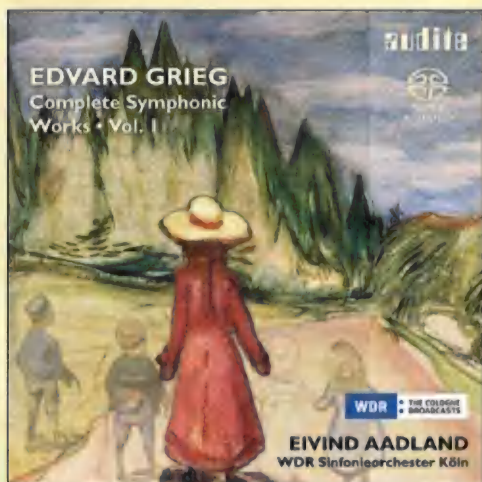
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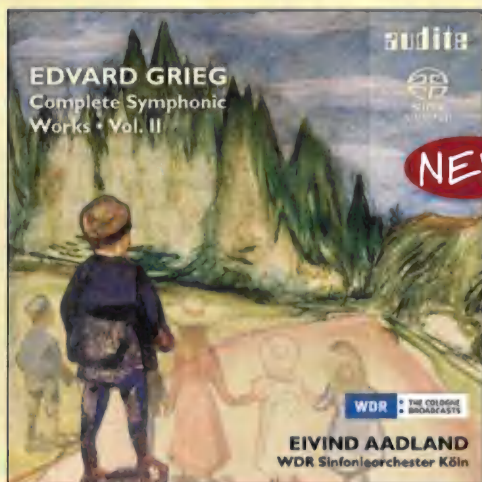
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Mark Baldwin

The Rambert Dance Company's artistic director reflects on his musically diverse childhood and how this influenced his choreography

I was born in Fiji – my mother's side is Fijian – and I was exposed to a lot of tribal music. Now it makes me feel homesick when I hear it, even though I left Fiji for New Zealand when I was four. My parents listened to *South Pacific* and *Porgy and Bess*, and I used to enjoy listening to the radio when I was growing up. As a student I loved listening to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. My grandmother kept saying 'He's musical', and she would have me sing notes that she played on the piano. I used to sing in the school choir, too, and played the piano and violin. My music teacher told me he could make me a fiddler, but I was boarding with a family at the time, and my practising drove them nuts. So by the time I was 14 or 15, I had stopped playing instruments altogether. But there was still something about classical music that I loved – it was like a plane you could just jump on.

Music makes me move in a way I had never thought possible. I was always the mad person at the party who would just dance and dance. I could lie by the record player for hours being lost in music. I won a scholarship to study foreign art but I used the money to go to the ballet school over the road from the art school.

John Drummond was my music mentor, which was significant when I first started choreographing. He told me, 'If you're going to work with a composer, you're going to come out with something original'. If you're using classical music it has to be all or nothing. The ballets where Kenneth MacMillan chopped and changed things around haven't survived. And Twyla Tharp's *Push Comes to Shove*, which uses bits of this and that, looks like a patchwork bedspread these days. That's why I love working with composers – you might come up with something fantastic and new.

I first met Henze on a beach in Africa in 1993 or 1994. He used to hire a house while he'd spend three months writing an opera. I was singled out by his boyfriend, although I was really tired and didn't want to meet anyone. But when Henze said, 'I composed *Ondine* for Margot Fonteyn', I was his best friend! He suggested I choreograph Monteverdi's *Vespers* because it was so 'dancy' – the result, *Vespri*, was the my first hit with the Mark Baldwin Dance Company. When I worked with Henze on *Labyrinth*, he'd say 'Show me something', and I would demonstrate a procession or the way a minotaur would behave. In the true spirit of Diaghilev, you're trying to create something more powerful together than you could do as individuals.

But each time you start a relationship with a composer, it's different. When I worked with Howard Goodall on *Eternal Light*, the music was all quite slow, so we asked him for fast stuff and he happily provided two really fast movements. In a way they bookended the piece – to wake you up at both ends was how I saw it! I've done two projects with Julian Anderson and I loved working with him – he's so conceptual and concise. With the last one, *The Comedy of Change*, we worked quite



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Henze always talks about the spiritual, though he's an atheist. *The Creation* shares spirituality with everyone.

closely. He'd give me ideas by pointing me towards music he'd written before, and I also went to his place as he devised it minute by minute.

Some choreographers would say that a good piece of music can save a bad piece of choreography but not vice versa. I would actually say you can inject vigour and buoyancy into a dull piece of music if you have people jumping around to it. Often I'm given pieces of music by composers, and if they're dull you have to make them interesting.

It was wonderful to work with Stephen McNeff on *Seven for a Secret*, my current project. It's based on Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*; Stephen's added four of his own interludes and then taken parts of the opera to write a whole new piece. He's kept the gorgeous rise and fall, and lush, childlike beauty – I do think he's the unsung musical genius of today. Stephen wanted a libretto but I didn't – it was quite radical but I said, 'Ditch the libretto dude – we're going to do freefall here'. In the end I think he was quite pleased that I got my way! 6

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